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DRAGONS' TEETH.

BY THE

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DRAGONS' TEETH.

CHAPTER I.

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE NEVER DOES RUN
SMOOTH.

THE nearer Ned Walford drew to the hour appointed the less he liked it. There was hardly sufficient opposition or difficulty to keep up the excitement. And this reminds us of one of the wise saws of Mrs. Winter.

Mrs. Winter once remarked, that “of all the wrong-headedness and the rubbish with which the devil imposed on silly young folk, what they called ‘love’ was the most *owdacious*—as long as there was a difficulty or opposition, solong it was sure to last; whereas, the girl that was to be had for asking was the last to have her banns up.”

On this principle—believing that Cupid ever delights to fly against the wind—we deem it fortunate for the interest of this chapter of the

Walford family history that there was a little plotting and adventure, and so far there was a dash of excitement in the plan proposed.

The gentleman had to steal away from King's College, Oxford ; the lady and her bundle were also to contrive an escape from the "Stag Inn," Woodstock. Still, this was hardly difficulty enough to fire him. His humour had of late been tried by a strange variety of alternatives — everything had been operating with a strong countervailing tendency. For, first, having now recovered from his accident, Ned had enjoyed a hard run with the hounds. After this—a very severe run — he had left off nine miles the other side of Banbury ; and this violent shake up, added to plenty of "bishop," or mulled port, at supper — all being within four-and-twenty hours of "the great event to come off" at Woodstock — very materially altered the general colour and complexion of things without, from the gradual revolution that had been wrought on the man within.

Then a letter had come from his mother, full of hopes, suggestions, and maternal wishes and expectations, all which savoured of a far more natural and sensible course of things — expectations utterly to be foiled by the mad step he was about to take.

Even the general routine of College life—lectures, parties, and engagements various—all coming in as usual, and implying on the part of all the College a general presumption of finding Ned Walford in the same College rooms, between Chapel and Hall, on the morrow—even this made him feel that the stream was all against him, and that there was something very startling and “abnormal” in what he was about to do.

“What’s that portmanteau for?” asked Le Croix, who happened to catch sight of one as Ned’s bedroom-door was open. “You are not going down before the end of term, impatient for the woodcocks—are you, now?”

Ned gave some evasive reply.

Later in the day, as he was stealing out of College while the men were in Hall, the very sight of the tables in the lighted hall, with blazing fire, and some ninety men—some with heads down, eating, and some with their chins up in air, talking between the acts—this, as also being run against by a scout with his hands full of hot pewter plates, tended still more to make the walk out of College—never, perhaps, to be allowed to come in again—anything but consistent with unruffled composure or pleasurable reflections.

Even John Green, when he came for the

portmanteau, and the same John, again, when he brought Ned out his dog-cart, seemed very blank and discouraging : he had not as much as one knowing, cheerful word to say to him. Very strange on so interesting an occasion !

Ned remembered afterwards, that John Green spoke rather ominously and monosyllabically, as if he were not half hearty in the cause : there was also a keen wind blowing, and a cold drizzling rain ; so, everything that evening conspired to make Ned feel that all was bleak and negative—nothing seemed genial or sympathising in his undertaking : though every bridegroom, even under the most favourable circumstances, feels the support and countenance of a friend much more than a mere formal and complimentary attention.

However, in half an hour things looked brighter. The rain ceased: the sky cleared: stars were visible, and already Ned anticipated the comfort of a moonlight night. His cigar, too, had begun to produce its usual sedative effects; and by the time he had enjoyed a glass of brandy and water at the famous "Barley Mow," near the Stanley Gate, all his old pleasurable associations at nearing Alice had resumed their former sway—he had shaken off all the qualms of starting, and was almost himself again.

Had anything more been wanting to make him wholly hearty in the cause, Ned had been a sorry fellow indeed, and wholly unworthy our acquaintance, if he had not found it in a little incident which shortly followed.

On reaching the deer-stile at the end of Blenheim Park—the place of assignation, as already mentioned,—at first, no one was to be seen. Ned was astounded. What could have happened? Had the lady fair been foiled in her fugitive attempts? After waiting a few minutes, first one person and then another passed down the road, and all seemed to turn and look inquisitively at Walford. This looking and staring seemed suspicious—though people will naturally look at a gentleman waiting in the road, in a dog-cart, after dark. Having looked to their full satisfaction, two or three walked on, and soon, as it happened, were succeeded by some others. At length, all was still—no more were in sight: and, just as Ned was making a thousand painful conjectures about the non-appearance of Alice, he thought he saw something moving in the hollow of the bank on one side of the road. A single glance, by the strong light of his gig-lamps, showed him who it must be: when, almost speechless from agitation, out crawled the poor Alice, bundle and all.

She had been at the place appointed some time: and terrified imagination had conjured every traveller into a pursuer, till she thus had taken refuge behind the brushwood, shrinking into the very holes of the earth for terror !

Ned's heart was touched with pity: all his generous resolutions to rescue Alice from her persecutors — those horrid Woodstock loons — once more glowed within his breast, and, with one word of fondness, he had reached her with his hand, relieved her of her bundle, and seated her safely by his side. Then briefly saying, “Cling fast to me, my dearest, till we are clear away,” he set himself well to his work, with both hands feeling the mouth, and giving way to the struggling neck of his favourite mare, who at once sprang off with her best spanking pace, and was far away in the open country before the trembling Alice could realise where she was.

It was not till Ned had struck off from the main road into the cross-country lanes, to intercept the London mail, at the point arranged with Mr. John Green aforesaid, that the mare, owning the severity of the hill by her slackened pace, gave Ned time to throw some good soft tweeds around the shivering traveller, and to talk composedly of their journey. Composure, however, with Alice, was little to be expected. There is not

always much composure, even when the bride is led by approving friends and relatives to step, proud and triumphantly, into the coach-and-four. So we must feel for the trembling of this poor, hunted hare—this captive flying from the house of bondage—and supported only by the one and only arm that, of all she knew in those inhospitable parts, would not have been rather raised against her. Besides, first love is a very revolution in the heart of woman; and all the throbbing hopes and thrilling fears that man knows, perhaps, in the crisis of a life, are surging in her tender bosom within the compass of an hour.

Ned much feared, at one time, Alice would have fainted, or gone into a fit: she wept and sobbed so convulsively, from the unnatural tension of nerve she had for days endured, yielding at this the first moment of her relief. Ned's "pocket-pistol," with a sip of brandy, came most timely to his aid—and he comforted her by the arrangements he had made for the whole inside of the mail, and the care he would take of her at the inn at Henley. But, all this while, Walford had forgotten that the paces of his favourite mare had been instinctively quickening with the quickened pulse of her driver, and he would evidently fall into the London road nearly an hour earlier than the mail would pass the four cross-

ways: so, remembering the “Three Black Crows,” a small wayside inn, always provided with biscuits, cherry-brandy, and a good recipe for egg-hot, and such-like comforts, exclusively intended to tempt “the Oxford Collegers” to stop and bait, to diversify a mere idle drive—Ned resolved on stopping, to give Alice some tea, and endeavour to calm and revive her spirits.

Some older men, and some wiser women than Alice, might have seen danger in this little arrangement, seeing that, to all persons of age and experience, queer coincidences, and meetings with the very last people in the world you would expect to meet, have occurred so often, that we learn at last never to throw a single chance away. But, happily, old heads are rarely found on young shoulders, or the game of life—like games that are played to a certainty, and the end to be seen from the beginning—were too dull and monotonous to be played at all. However, Ned shouted for the landlord to take his horse, and had soon led Alice—as confidently as any country gentleman would have led his wife—into the inn. Little did he consider that the stamp and style of the “young Oxford Colleger” was implied by his very age, look, and manner, as well as by his garb and equipage, as plainly as if graven upon his brow and painted

upon his dog-cart. This oversight was excusable enough: but he might at least have remembered that no lady was so likely to be recognised all the country round as the barmaid of the “Stag.”

There was only one little parlour, with wood-fire, and settle, and bright brass kettle and warming-pan, by way of ornaments, as usual, and in this room Walford found two young farmers, having a quiet glass and quiet chat with Mrs. Bolam, the landlady.

“We are rather too soon for the mail, Mrs. Bolam, and will trouble you for some tea.”

“Yes, sure, Sir,” said the good woman, expecting to see nothing less than a respectable married lady, of steady age, inside her house at that time of night; when suddenly she started back, and said,—

“It isn’t, sure-ly, Mrs. Winter’s young woman? No—never! Why, I can’t believe my old eyes! What! and out here with a College gentleman, alone, at this hour of the night! Why, of all I ever knew of these ’Varsity gents, this do shock me most of all!”

“Hush, hush, Mrs. Bolam—all right, I assure you!” said Walford.

“I have left Mrs. Winter’s situation now,” said Alice, meekly—clearly identifying one of

Mrs. Winter's constant customers on every market-day.

"And what will Muster Gould, of the glove-shop, think about this start, my dear?" said one of the young farmers. "Well, the folks at Woodstock said as nothing would do for you under a gentleman; so I suppose this is it."

Walford felt now in a dire dilemma. To speak out was to reveal more than his pride would condescend to accord to what—not understanding the ruder feelings of honest country people—he deemed the most insufferable impertinence: but, on the other hand, not to speak, were to plead guilty of bringing improper company into "an honest woman's house"—a point on which ladies of Mrs. Bolam's class were unusually sensitive. It might also encourage the loose jests of a couple of boors.

So Walford did the best thing he could do under the circumstances. He called Mrs. Bolam aside, and assured her that the said young woman of the "Stag" was a lady in distress, born to better things, and she would soon hear—and should have a bit of the bridecake—that he had lawfully and honourably married her, and had restored her to her proper position in society.

After this brief explanation, which formed

an interesting adventure in the wayside life of Mrs. Bolam, she became suddenly so deferential to "Miss Hengen," and shot from her screwed-up eyes such telegraphic admonitions to the young farmers, that Alice enjoyed her tea without annoyance, till it was once more time to muffle up and step into the dog-cart.

Ned looked at his watch by the light of his lamps before he got up, and said, "We shall just hit the right time. 'Black Bess' will do the distance to the four cross-roads in half-an-hour, and then the sight of John Green will assure me that all is right."

The moon was now up—the air was keen and exhilarating. The crisp sound under the wheels, and a little slipping in Black Bess's paces, showed—for it was early in December—that it was a hard, frosty night. However, they arrived safe at the four cross-roads, and were satisfactorily certified by the man at the toll-bar that the mail had not passed, but was due in a few minutes.

After a while, "I hear the mail," said Alice.

"No, Miss," said the man; "you can't hear it yet :" for little did he understand that acute tension of the nerves that quickens the ears of those who listen as for life. But Alice did hear—the mail was coming; and Walford thought

there was more sound of hoofs and sound of wheels than usual, when quickly Sam Pollard drew up (for that knight of the whip it was), and some other carriage, yards behind, seemed to draw up, too : but as to this, when Walford saw John Green, the man in possession, quickly stepping out to give him "the inside," he little heeded it, but exclaimed, in a matter-of-course tone,—

"Well, John, all right—eh?"

"Why, Sir," said John, in a very clear, audible tone, yet intended for a confidential whisper (for it was John's game to play on both sides), "whether it's all right, or all wrong, I ain't no judge: only 'tisn't the sort o' manners that, most in general, one Proctor and two bulldogs (officers) reckons all right, and so you'd better make up your mind that's them in the shay behind."

Ned felt something like a shot at the heart —reined up the mare—looked quickly round, and seeing two horsemen riding right up to him, said faintly to Alice, "Hold fast; I must run for it"—and dashed up the road with the mare at full speed: having just identified the voices of his brother Nat and Tom Snipe calling upon him to hear one word before he went.

A full gallop, with all the spring of the

shafts peculiar to a high dog-cart, is perhaps the most frightful motion to which any fair lady's nerves ever were exposed on the queen's highway at ten o'clock at night. And when added to the known mettle of the mare, which was still further excited by the sound of hoofs clattering close behind her, the pace was something desperate—awful in the extreme—and much too severe to last : for Snipe, well mounted, tried carefully to head the mare, when suddenly she shied—swerved—staggered on the foot-path—and with one heavy plunge and crashing sound, as of splintered shafts and twanging metal, was floundering in the ditch ; while, as to poor Alice and Walford, they were shot some ten feet at least clear of the trap against the dense, but yielding brushwood, of a strong bull-fence.

If there is a man in the moon—and if the said lunar gentleman can enjoy a bird's-eye view of all the freaks and vagaries, and all the ups and downs of the sorry denizens of this strange earth, he has rarely looked down on a more interesting picture than was now below his silver orb on that eventful evening.

There lay Walford, stunned and motionless ; Alice, embedded in the brake, more frightened than hurt. The mail that was to have borne far

away the happy couple, having drawn up to see the worst, was already winding far a-head ; Black Bess, clear of her harness, or of most of it, was galloping like mad across the meadow ; while Nat Walford, with much brotherly vexation, and Tom Snipe, with an acute sense of the ridiculous, each holding a horse by the bridle, were standing at his side—John Green, with an eye to business, was examining the dilapidated trap ; while Mr. Wireman the Proctor, and two bulldogs, were awaiting returning consciousness to proclaim the University bill of pains and penalties against young men detected in improper company ; and penalties yet more severe against young women, who, of course, are always deemed the great corrupters of innocence academical.

But all things have an end. In the drama of life, as in the drama of fiction, however striking and suggestive the positions, the characters cannot of course stand for ever : accordingly, this truly pitiful couple were removed in the Proctor's chaise to Oxford ; and Walford, next morning, had a very confused recollection of anything that had happened between seeing Black Bess's bright shoes flashing like lightning about his splash-board, and finding himself, with a doctor's apprentice by his side, in his own bed at King's.

Poor Alice's night's lodging had well-nigh

proved very different ; for Mr. Wireman — being, one of those precocious youths who, what with hydrocephalus and cramming, rise, much in advance of all worldly knowledge and common sense, to rank among scholars, and eventually to the responsible position of Proctor, or university magistrate — had no discrimination for a case like this, and would certainly have disposed of Alice Hengen in precisely the same manner as he dealt with unhappy girls of another class, and was actually sending her by the hand of his satellites to the gaol.

But happily, at this critical moment, Mr. Buxton made his appearance, and for the part that he had that night taken, and the good service done, claimed to be heard on the side of Alice ; and seeing that the chief difficulty which remained consisted in deciding what else was to be done with a broken-hearted and hysterical lady at eleven o'clock at night, Mr. Buxton very humanely offered to take her to his house, and to answer for her appearance, if wanted, on the morrow.

CHAPTER II.

EVERY ONE HAS HIS SAY UPON THE OCCASION.

It does not take much time for any story as interesting as an elopement to spread through a populous country town; but within the narrow precincts of a college, as in a large family establishment, the news is heard almost at once.

“ Seven o’clock, Sir,” said old Hedges, my scout, to me, on the morning after this spirit-stirring adventure, at the same time standing still at the door till I had time to rub my eyes.

“ Yes, yes; I hear. But what do you stand there for?”

“ Mr. Walford, Sir, I was making bold to tell you, did make such an awkward business of it last night—Smashed his trap, Sir, and fell into the hands of the Proctors. He was carried

through the porter's lodge after eleven o'clock, most dead, Sir. And the young woman that it was all about, Sir, I heard was walked off straight to night-quarters."

"Young woman?"

"Yes, Sir. One of Woodstock, Sir. Mr. Walford is better this morning, and has been asking all about it—but they'll be sure to tell him all about it quick enough. There must be a Common Room held upon him, of course, Sir. Porter said he was all in a heap and stupid-like—and he did look very bad when the Proctors brought him in last night. And, late as it was, they asked to see Mr. Walesby; so I suppose Mr. Walford is in a fair way of having his 'walking ticket.'—Don't you think so, Sir?"

Every man was rushing up at once to Walford's rooms; but the medical attendant, who had enough to do with the bruises and necessary fomentations, kept all away from him till the second day after the accident.

Meanwhile, some went to John Green, to learn the history of this very exciting nocturnal adventure from him. No one suspected the source of the Proctors' information, and as to John, he appeared particularly at a loss to divine it: but one and all of his long stories about the Proctors, the bulldogs, the young woman, the

broken trap, and the trouble he had to catch the mare, were accompanied with one observation—that “it wanted a deal of ‘precious good stuff’—(meaning money)—to manage such a job as this, as should be, and it was all a mistake to try it on economical.”

Next day, Ned had no lack of visitors—but with far more “chaff” than “kind inquiries”—men of all tastes and habits—men of all views, ideas, and of “sets”—sets sporting, sets literary, or sets dilettanti—all must have their turn at Ned, with observations and remarks more or less sensible or serious, according to their respective habits. But all these observations, it will be observed, however various, all bore more or less on one point: that one and all spoke of it as an absurdity, and little less than stark madness, if he even intended to marry Alice Hengen. This was too mad a thing to be believed; so, it was generally spoken of as an alliance of a temporary, and, indeed, of a far less respectable nature; while as to the innocence and respectability of the lady, and her superiority to others in the same questionable situation in life, that never was deemed worthy of a thought.

This was in one sense fortunate for Walford—if, indeed, anything could be fortunate which tended to sap and undermine an engagement

which had gone so far to compromise the character of an innocent girl.

First, Le Croix came with—"Well, old fellow, you 've 'been and done it,' as the saying is, *et nullus error*, 'and no mistake.' But why didn't you tell me? I would have made your bed up for you, and made it appear you slept in College. If Hedges found a bottle of wine on your table, he would not have looked very hard at the deception, you know—— But, what were you thinking of? Some one betrayed you. No doubt some woman, out of jealousy. Was it the mother of that fine brat of yours, do you think, whose health we drank at Newnham?"

Here Le Croix alluded to a toast, proposed by himself: only, while describing the Newnham party, we cared not unnecessarily to introduce the speeches of men who gloried in their shame.

After a whiff or two at his cigar, this cool and self-satisfied judge of human nature continued:—

"Alice is very pretty, certainly; but bad style—vulgar. She acts the lady, but not at all like——Matilda at Jones' cigar-shop does it better by a great deal—Alice's attempt is too apparent—it won't do. No, no. You could not have been such a flat as to be caught by that——"

"Really, when I first heard it, I did not believe it was you. I suspected Elwyn of Corpus: he is always after Alice. Rickworth said, No. He suspected either Wilder of University, or else Fred. Owen, of New Inn Hall. Alice would go off with some one, that was very clear. Mother Winter was an old fool to choose such a decoy-duck. But, my good fellow, if you would put yourself in danger's way, this was bad taste; indeed it was — slow — green — and all that kind of thing. All the men in our set will be sure to vote it slow. Come, if you do get out of this scrape, you must for the future — indeed you must — be just a little more select."

Walford no more dared to stop this representative of public opinion — to say that Alice was a lady, and he intended to treat her as such — than he dared to bite his fingers off.

Walford was one of those men — their name is Legion — who would rather plead guilty to being a little of the knave, than be laughed at as a fool.

Le Croix then went on to tell light tales — false, every one — at Alice's expense, leaving an undoubted impression on the mind of Walford that he had been encountering one danger more than he had reckoned on. Evidently, it were idle to think of proving to his mother, his

relations, and the county families generally about Richcourt, that he had married some one better than a barmaid ; when public rumour, like Mr. Wireman, the Proctor, had ranked her as belonging to a wretched class, far, far lower still.

This may seem a cruel injustice to Alice Hengen ; but the simple explanation is this :—There are certain positions in which it is very difficult for Innocence itself in female form to keep a character, and Alice had been thrown into one of these critical positions, and fared accordingly.

By the time Le Croix was about to leave, Norman came to have his say. He said he just stepped in to make polite inquiries, and hoped Walford was as well as could be expected ; that the correct etymology of Woman was “Woe-to-man,” and that the correct derivation of the word Proctor was from the two Latin words, *pro* for, and *curro* to run—that is, “to run for to catch” the said workers of woe to the lords of the creation ; and certainly, true to their office, they did allow the poor creatures as little quarter as any animal in all natural history. He sympathised with Walford as a very ill-used individual, because he had, at all events, attained to years of discretion, whether the discretion had

made its appearance or not ; and his notions of the liberty of the subject were, that full-grown children had a Magna-Charta right to burn their own fingers in their own way.—He ended by saying, he was sorry to find Walford's morals of so low a type ; but since all naughty young men, from the idle apprentice to the profligate young lord, were always supposed to be victims to artful females, and to require being vaccinated with folly and inoculated with naughtiness, while women had it in the natural way. Therefore, Walford might fairly come in for the usual indulgences, and (so-called) charitable interpretations — especially as everybody said that the lady's reputation, however damaged by the adventure, was by no means sound before.

Rickworth followed on the same side, save that he asked some touching questions as to what had become of “the poor girl :” he was actually betrayed into this very strange and questionable — and, indeed, men do feel — rather unpleasant mode of expression. He also added that, good, bad, or indifferent, Alice had at all events a good roof over her head — bed, board, and three meals a-day up to the hours of Walford's excusable weakness ; and he only hoped (though he rather doubted) she would have such creature comforts still.

Le Croix said "this was a very prosy view of the case, and if men were allowed to talk like that, there was an end to everything."

Norman looked steadfastly at Rickworth, and both said they thought that, as regarded "everything" of a certain kind, Rickworth's view of the case was very likely to bring it to an end—so likely, that they could not imagine anything more conducive.

Many others soon followed—chiefly idle, thoughtless fellows: and, since all such men consider that knowledge of the world consists in vilifying all the women in it, they showed off their knowledge by repeating every bit of scandal—of course, no little—that would naturally arise from many a silly fellow boasting of the impression he had made on the pretty barmaid at the "Stag."

Yes, "pretty *barmaid*" — "barmaid" — and nothing but "barmaid"—Walford found was, on all sides, the predominant idea—so forbidding and uncomplimentary was the language of every one who spoke of the lady whom he had so nearly made his wife!

Nothing was so well calculated to make a mind like Walford's veer round as this. Argument he might have answered. Contradiction, thwarting, and opposition, are nearly sure to

rivet the chain of love ; but this quiet under-current of public opinion modifies the very atmosphere of the thoughts — insensibly a change comes over the spirit of your dream, and the sternest resolution gives like an iceberg on a sunny day.

CHAPTER III.

THE "COMMON ROOM."

IN the course of the next day Walford, being reported comparatively convalescent, received formal notice to hold himself ready to appear before a Common Room, as the President and Fellows deemed it requisite to hold a Council to consider the means to be taken to maintain the discipline of the College, and to vindicate its character, which had been so seriously compromised before the whole University.

This sounded anything but pleasant to Walford, because all the College servants, as well as Undergraduates, entertain a deferential horror of a Common Room—as a kind of Inquisition, or Star-Chamber, and Court without Appeal.—Appeal? Why, the poor culprit generally stands dumb-founded; feeling, especially if he be an

old offender, that it is far better to say nothing, than to run the risk of putting the assembled Dons out of conceit of their own shrewdness and penetration.

It is the same august court that sits sometimes on a scout who has failed to give timely notice of any one of his masters who has not slept in College over-night—the same court pronounces the certain doom of the porter who fails to record the exact hour at which any one has “knocked” in. This will account for the doleful associations in the mind of Hedges, and with what propriety—though to some it would appear unseemly familiarity—he said that he was “sorry for” Mr. Walford, and “felt for him, as if it had been himself.”

From some loss of blood, and a violent shock to his system, Walford was, at that time, in a highly nervous state. What to do, or how to communicate with Alice, he did not know. Even the fact that Mr. Buxton had taken care of her, he was some time in ascertaining; and, but for the good-hearted Rickworth, he might not have known even then. He had sent for Mr. Buxton, but heard that he would not be at home till late in the day.

And now this rich and independent young man—quite his own master, and with full right

to do as he liked, had actually had his favourite lady taken perforce from him — for, the Proctor had power to arrest her by virtue of his jurisdiction, to protect the morals of Oxford and five miles round — and, to crown all, he was now called up, like a boy before his master, to give an account of his conduct, as he would have expressed it, to “Gritty Thompson,” and all the other Dons.

“But could he not take his name off the books, and bid the President and all the Dons defiance in an hour?”

Shakespeare makes one of the free and independent voters of ancient Rome, in the case of Coriolanus’s canvass, say something that has a very wide application in common life:—“We have power in ourselves to do it; but it is a power that we have no power to do.”

So, Walford’s power, undoubted in the abstract, was, like unlimited power of another kind, held in check by public opinion. He had been long enough at College to learn that most important truth, that not money, but mind and “manners maketh the man;” and that whereas the one weak point in his character, and also his sore reflection, always was, that while almost every man had his *forte* in some way, he himself excelled in nothing, and was good for nothing

—as he had been more than once most unceremoniously told — he could not help feeling that his one chance of holding up his head as high as most of the countrymen, with whom he had begun to associate, was to boast the honour of an M. A. degree, and to let those significant letters ever after testify the existence of wits while at the University, however scarce they might make themselves ever after.

John Hackles had contrived delicately to suggest this view of the case to Walford : saying, “ You must remember, Walford, you have not had the benefit of a public school, and that severer training which, now the smart is over, gives so decided an advantage, and so favourable a start in life, to your brother Nat : so, everybody will naturally watch your career at Oxford ; and only imagine what the conclusion must be, if you cannot hold your place in this public competition with men of your own age and standing.” The question of taking his name off the College books was debated that morning : but Tom Snipe would not hear of it. “ As to rustication and loss of a term, you will be at home for the shooting. Many a young fellow has made a slip before you ” (Tom Snipe had been rusticated himself) ; “ and all that will be forgotten in a creditable degree. So, mark my words.

If you take your name off it will count as expulsion ; as something too bad to stand inquiry ; and then, as Homer would say,—

‘ What nuts to Sir Buller ! how delighted to find
 You have taken a step that is just to his mind ! ’ ”

But Brother Nat lost all patience. He had heard enough from Buxton to think it at least doubtful whether Ned did not intend to bring home Alice as his lady of Richcourt Hall. Neither did Nat entertain any other opinion of the character of Alice Hengen than was assigned her by common report. Nat, therefore, told him plainly, that supposing the last disgrace of the family to be happily avoided, their mother had in other respects endured a great deal for his sake—her anxieties were really a cruelty to think of, and were actually undermining her health ; and that to take so serious a step as taking his name off without consulting her—when, after all, there was no knowing what the result of the Common Room might be—would be condemned by every relative and friend Ned had in the world.

Ned felt exceedingly puzzled. He *was* his own master, and yet he was not. There were more things in heaven and earth than were dreamt of in his philosophy. He was held by

more ties than he ever thought of. He enjoyed a certain standing in society at Oxford—and to be suddenly thrown out of it, especially before he had done anything to redeem his character, after making himself so ridiculous as not to keep himself and his lady fair out of the hands of the Proctors—which was evidently voted “a very slow trick” by every set in College—this alternative seemed even worse than appearing before the Common Room. If he could only pay so much money down and have done with it, he would not mind; but here was another instance—and life has many such—in which money can no more avail than with a bad conscience or a sick headache.

Had he taken his name off the books on the occasion of his marriage, it had looked fair and consistent enough; but a private hint to take off your name is the same thing as expulsion: and this is so well understood, that Walford felt grievously lowered in his own estimation. He had been able to realise the position more than once in the case of others, and was painfully conscious of the loss of caste it involved. He had also observed in others, and even felt in himself, a secret sense of superiority over those who were unceremoniously weeded out of the flock—if not a contempt for such men: and

very naturally so; for, however much young men may enjoy a laugh at a silly fellow, the race of simpletons or of scamps are never much regretted; and such are the characters of the expelled, and such the shabby company with whom his name would be associated.

But while we are deliberating time is flying, and very often settles the matter for us. Accordingly, at two o'clock—the time named in the notice that Walford had received in the morning—the Common-Room man came with the President's compliments, and Mr. Walford was expected at the President's house, at which the solemn conclave that day happened to be held.

Dr. Burley, the President, was very old and deaf; indeed, quite superannuated, and required to be prompted at every turn. Hearing something about a dog-cart—which was not a term of his younger days—he began to lecture Walford about driving with dogs in a cart—and when Mr. Walesby said, in a shrill whisper—“No—a young woman”—he corrected himself, and spoke of the extreme vulgarity, as well as the impropriety, of his driving about a young woman in a cart.

This was a new source of disgust to Walford: but thinking that no explanation would mend the matter very materially, he took the

chance of the tutors and fellows—seven in all, who formed the conclave—knowing better.

This was judicious enough: because Mr. Walesby, the Vice-President, soon took the lead from the President, and conducted the inquiry.

He said he was very much astonished, as well as grieved, at being called on, as late as eleven o'clock at night, by the Proctor, to hear so formidable a complaint, arising out of an adventure that Mr. Walford's shattered appearance proved to have been highly dangerous, and might have ended fatally. What could it all mean? It seemed undoubted that Mr. Walford had been seen driving the barmaid of the "Stag Inn," Woodstock, at ten in the evening, and meditated a flight with her in the mail to London. He was bound to ask, Could any explanation be given? No! Then immorality was stamped on the very face of it. No one could suppose it was a woman of character he was driving.

Hereupon there was a pause, as if for Walford to say something if he could. And Walford did say something. He replied, that however sorry to have done anything apparently against University regulations, he would declare, upon the word and honour of a gentle-

man, that the character of the person alluded to he believed to be wholly irreproachable.

"Let me ask you one question, Mr. Walford: Was not the Proctor on the point of sending this wholly irreproachable young woman to the Bridewell?"

"True, true," interposed Mr. Thompson (the "Gritty Thompson" of former days); "but I had better say that a very worthy man interposed, and thought she deserved milder usage. But I am afraid, Mr. Walford, this hardly mends the matter, as far as your conduct is concerned."

"Certainly not," said Mr. Lynam, the Dean: "it makes the case a great deal worse. If you found her innocent, you did not intend to leave her such—that is very evident."

Walford was now in a sad dilemma, indeed. He had told enough of the truth to make things worse, but not enough to make things better.

Mr. Thompson had heard enough from Buxton to suspect how the matter stood, and therefore he said,—

"I trust, however strange the case may appear, that Mr. Walford can throw a little lighter shade over this dark business."

Walford felt now in a state of simmer and effervescence. Truth in the breast is like certain little birds in a cage, that, when least intended,

will pop up and chirp : and the truth in this case was all but out ; for Walford replied,—

“ Gentlemen, I can only say that my intentions were highly—were—were — I would say, my intentions were by no means as bad as you give me credit for.”

“ What does he say ? ” asked the old President, reading, as deaf men do, in the arched brows and lengthened faces of the party, that there was something worth hearing at last.

“ He says, Sir, he had no bad intentions,” bawled out Mr. Lynam, with that strong cynical tone that made him the most unpopular man that was ever hissed and hooted at Commemoration.

“ No bad intentions ! and—driving a young woman in a cart at ten o’clock at night ! Well, in all the forty years I have lived at this College, I never did hear such a lame excuse as that.”

Then they all put their heads together and began to whisper, and immediately it was unanimously voted that they had heard quite enough. Mr. Lynam said something just at this moment which made the others laugh. He was a man of low extraction, and essentially vulgar in every thought and word. It was afterwards declared by Norman, that the exact words, he was sure,

were those most common in the rural districts,—
“If you don’t ask any questions, you won’t hear
any lies.”

There was then a pause; after which Mr. Walesby was the speaker:—

“Mr. Walford, you may retire to your rooms.
The decision at which we arrive in your case
shall be communicated in due course.”

In the course of an hour Walford received,
by the hands of the Common-Room man, a paper
to this effect:—

“November —, 18—.

“Mr. Walford will leave the University be-
fore twelve o’clock to-morrow, and not return till
after the Easter vacation.

“Common Room,

“King’s College.”

CHAPTER IV.

HOW BLESSINGS PROVE BLISTERS.

IT was about two o'clock, the day after this sentence of Rustication had been pronounced on the Heir of Richcourt, that Mrs. Walford was sitting, pensive and sad, with two letters by her side, upon both of which many a scalding tear had fallen : she was also momentarily expecting a visit from a very excellent friend, for whom she had sent to console her—or to whom, at least, that she might vent her grief in words.

One of these letters was from Mr. Walesby, the Vice-President of the College, who wrote, as in duty bound, to apprise Walford's "only surviving parent" of his disgrace.

The other was from her younger son Nat, who was too thoughtful to leave his mother in

that distracting state of mind, which doubt or uncertainty about the full length and breadth of our troubles invariably excites.

The tenor of the Vice-President's letter was, that he had much pain in announcing that her son was under sentence of Rustication : he had been discovered in very questionable company late at night, and immorality was an offence by no means to be overlooked. Still, he could afford Mrs. Walford the comfort of saying, that this punishment and temporary disgrace might prove all for the best—since, in his experience, many a youth had thus been checked in a wild career ; time had been allowed for his vicious companions to remove far away ; and eventually, the academical course of one thus timely arrested might prove not wholly without satisfaction.

Nat said something to the same effect ; adding, that poor Ned was, unfortunately, brought up as such a soft fellow, and so very green, that any silly *ruse*—above all, when there was a lady in the case—which a public-school boy would laugh at, was sure to prove too much for his simplicity.

Nat ended with hoping his dear mother would “cheer up ;” for, “really, things might be worse : and Ned had bought a little expe-

perience; for which, even the price of Rustication—since Ned was in no hurry about his Degree—was not too dear."

This blow, severe enough to every fond mother, fell with double severity on Mrs. Walford. She once had scruples about sending her boy to Oxford at all, because she had always heard that it was a sphere rife with every kind of temptation; and as to female snares, Dick Cheston had borne witness, in his own ridiculous way, that wherever you look you may decipher, with a little penetration, — "*Man-traps set on these premises.*" Yet she had allowed herself to be persuaded that there were temptations everywhere — out-reasoned rather than convinced.

Mrs. Walford was quite one of those ladies who, in regard to religion, have a nerve more in the heart, and less in the head. Very piously and reasonably disposed to trace the hand of God in everything, she committed the usual error of presuming that the Almighty always intended to punish whatever was uppermost, or most opposed to the prejudices of her own small religious party. That the Roman Catholic Emancipation, for instance, produced the Cholera Morbus, and the Papal Aggression the Potatoe Disease, was so much an article of their creed,

that they called, by very hard names, all those who reasoned otherwise.

It happened to be a gentleman who took rather a different view of the scheme of Providence, expecting to find causes and effects by not quite so many degrees removed — who just now entered the room : and after the two letters had been left to tell their own story, Mrs. Walford briefly said, she had been made so exceedingly unhappy that she ventured to send for him, partly from the interest he had ever evinced in her poor Edward from the very cradle, and partly for his consolation and advice.

“ You have, indeed, very correctly considered that the season of affliction is the season for truth — for a survey of the past — reflections, wholesome at least, however far from palatable.

“ You ask me, How can such sad trials be? Whence do they come? What root of bitterness to cure, or what, in this infliction, has the Almighty seen amiss?

“ In my view of the matter, for the causes of God’s chastisements we have, rarely, very far to seek — certainly, not in a case like the present. No. These afflictions grow up like tares and thistles, of which we, at some time, have sown the seed.”

"But have I not done all in my power to rear Edward tenderly, with every advantage, and the best of education?"

"True; but the best intentions do not protect us from the penalty of running counter to those mighty laws that rule the world.—What if, with the best intentions, you mistook the seed of tares for wheat, and sowed your field, what would be the crop?"

"Inevitably tares, of course."

"And what if your care of your son involved a youth of indulgence; one continued seed-time of selfish habits; the idol of others growing the idol of himself; living as the centre of one little system of masters for his mind, doctors for his health, riding-masters for his accomplishments, and flatterers of all kinds for their end, if not the boy's—with "Heir of Richcourt Hall" ever sounding in his ears?"

"But I cannot plead guilty to one point all this time. Every care was taken of his religious principles."

"Save that the very soul of religion was, in practice, continually left out. For,—

"What is the great law of the Gospel?—*Self-denial.*

"What is the ruling principle of all modern education?—*Self-indulgence!*

“But, are rich and poor to be brought up hardy alike ?”

“None want a training in self-denial more than the rich ; for, all through life, the poor have enough to compel it. Take your son’s case : in his daily life, pleasure, passion, all conspire to tempt him. His money removes all restraint from without. What is his only safeguard ? The power to weigh the future against the present — his duty to his friends and family, against his own gratification — ‘Sowing the wind’ in the trifles of childhood, you ‘reap the whirlwind’ in the deeper passions of an ungovernable life.”

“I admit that, as regards another world, it is written, ‘How hardly shall they that have riches enter —’”

“As regards another world only ! The law is one that rules this life present — ‘How hardly shall they behave themselves, first of all, in this life present ! — how hardly shall they fall in with that economy, which is ‘peace on earth, good will towards men’ — a life commenced on earth and consummated in heaven !’”

“Then, at this sad adventure of my dear boy you really are not surprised ?”

“Surprised ! I could expect no less.”

“But you are a sorry comforter. What have I to hope ? what can you recommend ?”

"Now, then, you lead me to take a more cheerful view. This misfortune, as you seem to regard it, is the best thing that could happen to him. Rustication by the College authorities, ridicule from his fellow-collegians, and many a bitter sneer from Sir Buller and all who bear him no good will at home — in all this I recognise the 'much tribulation' that may bring him back to his sober senses, and lead him to take a more just measure of himself."

"And, alas ! Edward has never known what it is to bear such hard usage."

"That just brings me back to the point from which I started. Life is a school of hard lessons and cross masters—of fagging, bullying, and 'taking places.' So far the world is the severest of all 'great public schools' — with trials of the temper various : and those who have not qualified for the ordeal early, must seek some purer planet than this rude earth to avoid hard truths and painful discipline at a little later season."

CHAPTER V.

HOW THE LADIES ARE THE WORST.

IF these were the feelings with which the mother received the College sentence, what were the feelings of the son! After receiving that very summary notice to quit—the identical document which Haddy, the scout, called his “walking ticket,”—Walford, whose table was honoured at all times rather for his wine than his wit, was surprised to find the remarkable equanimity with which men can bear their neighbours’ misfortunes. Le Croix and his friends, when once they heard the news, seemed to make a mental memorandum to live on some one else, and were gone before Walford had half his say about the provoking rudeness of Mr. Lynam, or the absurdity of the stupid old President.

John Hackles stepped in, as he said, for old-acquaintance sake, and “presuming of course that a man must be cast down by so stunning a

blow," encouraged him to cheer up, and said, "Had it been a poor fellow like me, ruin would stare me in the face; but with you, it little matters, provided that you do not, in a fit of disgust, fly off at a tangent, but read steadily at home, and come back at Easter, to live quietly and determined to take a creditable degree. Be advised, my dear fellow: your place and position is a marked one; and you are none the better for Richcourt, unless you take the proper course to defy the envy and jealousy of a set of poor creatures who would rejoice in your fall."

The good, honest sense and generous feeling of John Hackles, Ned could not but feel, contrasted most favourably with the hollow indifference of Le Croix. Ned thanked him for his friendly visit and advice, which he said "he hoped to follow; though, for one in his position, it was a good deal to put up with—was the impertinence of a parcel of fusty old Dons."

No sooner was Hackles gone than Tom Snipe came; and after casting a significant glance, as for Ned's acquiescence, he proceeded to "sport the oak," that is, to close the outer door, which shuts and locks with a spring—in order to have a little private conversation, which then began to the following effect:—

He wished Walford to understand that, as

regarded Alice Hengen, he had had a most lucky escape. Of his intention to marry her there could be no doubt; though others might not suspect it. “Yes, Ned,” he emphatically suggested, “at this very hour you might have been linked for ever—and linked to whom? Women are by nature inimitable actresses whenever they are sharp-set to play a part; and as to acting guileless innocence and distressed virtue, why the character is as old as the hills.”

“But do you really mean to declare that you doubt her character? Her family, you know, was originally good enough.”

“As to her character, it little matters what I think; the question is, What does all Oxford think,—nay, implicitly believe? And if so, what will all England think, far and wide as the homes of Oxford men? What will the county think? or your mother?—In short, I quite shudder when I follow out this sudden freak into all its consequences.—Not a lady would ever enter Richcourt Hall! and, unless you visited her alone, your mother would shrink instinctively from her own son’s presence!”

“But if I positively declared that I knew—that I believed her virtuous?”

“You could not reason with a thousand tongues. Besides, all would exclaim, ‘What

could you know?' 'What have we to do with your belief in this matter?'

"—Use your own sense, Walford. When Fred. Dyke married his servant, did not every one call it marrying his mistress? In your case, you admit this lady is a barmaid—aye, and an Oxford barmaid, too; set as a bait to Oxford men. Then, how would you reason if another made such a match? I am sure you would laugh at the very idea of 'virtue.' You would be the very first to say, 'Bosh! nonsense! I cannot weigh one chance in ten thousand against the clear voice of common sense.'

"—As to her family, her birth and parentage—we know, at all events, what her education, her rearing, has been. Would the daughter of a station-master grace Richcourt Hall? Put real merit out of the question. It matters not what things are, but what they appear——"

" And is a man to be such a slave to appearance?"

"I say that every man is such a slave—you yourself are, and must be, a slave to appearances. Look at the cut of your liveries—the eagles on your gate-posts—plate—dress—style. Why, man, life is made up of appearances; and, so far as there is consistency, the toil may be worth our while: but the one word, "bar-maid," or

even “station-master’s daughter,” would break the spell at once, and make the hollow farce transparently absurd.

“—Add to this, your family has no deep root in the county. Commerce is honourable, no doubt; but it is very far from stylish. Still, many a lady of high birth, and even title, would be happy to add her consequence to Richcourt Manor. And yet—oh! be wise for the future—all these golden prospects were all but blasted by—I am ashamed to say what—only three days ago!”

Every word that Snipe had uttered carried a power of argument to Walford’s mind. The very soul of all persuasiveness is this,—to touch the right chords in the heart, to conjure up the prejudices, to pique the pride, and probe to the very quick all the petty weaknesses and ambition of the man.

No one knew better than Walford that a certain stinging sarcasm had been published about his “genealogical tree being barely above the ground;” also, that all the talk and vaunting about “old county family,” ever on the lips of Sir Buller, among others, was intended from time to time as a “refresher” to Ned’s memory, for fear he should happen to forget that, however much he surpassed his neighbours in the number

of his acres, there were certain privileges and prerogatives, “not of purchase,” but of “descent;” and that the most flourishing green sapling ill compared with the ancient oak, though time and tempest had robbed it of its fairest limbs.

Richcourt was to Ned a religion and a creed, in which he had been born and bred. The blot on his escutcheon, he could only look to a high alliance to remove. The truth, therefore, Snipe contrived delicately to bring home to him at once was a most telling one—that, however unwise for a lord or a duke to marry an actress, he had himself no consequence to spare. To take Alice to Richcourt would be to immure her in misery; the very servants would be shocked: and as to old Richard, he would hang down his head as he opened the lodge-gate, and sigh over the fallen fortunes of the family, for which, for so many years of his life, he had joyed and sorrowed as if for his own.

If we also consider that the whole of Ned’s love was expressed by a certain flower called “Love in idleness,” and that matrimony loses very much of its romance upon closer acquaintance, we may the more easily understand what Æschylus calls “the shifting current of his veering soul.”

Before Tom Snipe had taken his departure from Walford's rooms, he could not help regarding Ned as a spectacle truly piteous to behold. There he sat—*quantum mutatus ab illo!* how suddenly fallen from his former self! Behold the Heir of Richcourt, pale and shaky in body, and sick and disgusted with himself and evil fortune, and literally disgraced; and, as John Green said, “turned out to grass;” or, as Norman designated it, “having to put his manners and morals under quarantine in country quarters, till all danger of infection was carefully removed.”

Just at this time a continued knocking was heard at the outer door, and a note was dropped through the slit in the “oak.” This note Snipe picked up, at the same time looking out after the bearer; and then he cautiously placed it on the table, hardly within the reach of his faint and languid friend.

Almost at the same moment Tom, at a second glance, exclaimed, “A note in a female hand—aye, and left by Buxton’s shopman, too!” Walford stretched his hand nervously, and with evident pain, to reach it, when Snipe covered the letter with his hand, and said, seriously and slowly—quite in that tone which had more than once held over his pupil the

spell which the stronger ever will hold over the weaker nature :—

“ Allow me—excuse me for one moment, if I withhold that letter: no doubt it is from Alice Hengen.”

As Walford showed impatience, Snipe continued :—

“ My dear Ned, you are just in that position in which a man wants a friend—when things seem not as they are—the whole world swimming before the eyes. At this critical moment, take but one step in the wrong direction, and you are lost for ever!

“ — You have often said you are your own master. Think not I deny it, or that you will have the slightest check from me. The simple question is, Do you now wish to marry Alice Hengen? If you do, take this letter—read it—answer it—name another day, not for flight to Gretna Green, but for the nearest parish church. Make up your mind to the fate of others you have known, who married—*disreputably* (in the world’s opinion, at least), and then, when I am once assured that it is no temporary insanity I resist, but your own deliberate self, your humble servant will not oppose—’twere folly—but assist you; aye, even go with

you to the church, and attend—ah, yes! ha, ha! — I will attend your *obsequies!*”

Ned's look showed that this was not very likely to be his decision. He said something to the effect, “What else to do—how to arrange—Buxton had heard from Alice's sister, and he believed she was just now going to her.”

“I know what you are thinking of—she has lost her situation at the ‘Stag.’ To return there, of course, she could not endure, were it even competent for her to do so. Well—your money will avail you now. What salary did Mother Winter pay her, do you suppose? Twenty pounds a-year, perhaps. Then, a twenty-pound note would be one year's salary—pretty well for one night's travelling!—or say forty pounds, two years' salary. Leave me to manage it. She shall be sent—we will say—safe and sound, to her elder sister; all expenses paid; and a fifty-pound note in her pocket when she reaches her new quarters. Buxton is a good, kind fellow, as his conduct now has proved, and he will explain how—soberly and practically considered—no other arrangements were practicable—were even for her happiness. He will say they are a very proud—indeed, a most disgusting—set of people about Richcourt—true enough that is, eh?—

so, of course, you could not endure to see her snubbed and slighted—and all that kind of thing! Depend upon it, since the lady has failed in a *coup d'état*, she has quite sense enough to see that to maintain her cause by means strictly constitutional, now that all Oxford has had time to testify to the exclusiveness of her devotion to King's College alone—— However—I'll say no more,” rising to be gone, and putting the note in his pocket; “you will leave all this to me.”

“But—but—let me see what she says——”

“No—no: be sensible—this correspondence must cease for ever! Out of sight, out of mind. She starts east, you west, to-morrow. After Easter, the ‘Stag Inn,’ Woodstock, will have another pretty lass—trust Mrs. Winter for that—and, for all we know, another Common Room may have sat in judgment on another Walford!”

That Ned Walford’s eye did not rest on the contents of this letter was, in the language of the world, “very fortunate.” By the same heartless standard, it was also very fortunate that John Hackles, who lived with that spirit which “thinketh no evil,” was not then the friend to advise.

John was a man to trust no one but himself. Whether John would very readily have given his confidence to any one in the position of a bar-

maid is a question: but having done so, no idle gossip would have made him swerve from the path he had once pledged himself to follow.

John Hackles, again, would have reasoned that the wiser course, because the right one, was “to honour your own truth;” and that, as to its being more or less fashionable to introduce a distressed lady—though a lady still—to Richcourt, that Richcourt Hall would never count the less honourable among any but either knaves or fools, because occupied by a man who could not understand that code of honour which seems to deem a poor, friendless, and unprotected girl, beyond the pale of all honest dealing.

As to Walford, the only excuse for him is that, being always brought up to lean on others, he dealt unto the unhappy Alice that hard measure which will ever be awarded when we “refer to our solicitor,” or “place in the hands of a friend,” matters in which our own feelings and our own conscience alone can tenderly and scrupulously judge.

But, adverting to the contents of the letter, we observed that the result might have been different, had it been read by him who could alone be supposed to enter into the feelings of the fond and devoted writer.

For, as soon as Tom Snipe had retired to his

own rooms, he proceeded to open the letter, expecting little else than the usual tirade of "love unto death," "hearts fused into one," and all the rapturous phraseology of a romantic attachment.

But very different was the strain that breathed from this truly devoted epistle; not one word was there about herself; but the deepest anxiety about Walford—her agony at the shock and cruel injuries he had sustained; and not least, at hearing of his rustication. That she felt most unhappy, most unworthy of such troubles on her account; but now he had dared the opinion of the world, their union would be easy, without concealment or disguise. She spoke of the joy with which she looked forward, by a life of devoted affection, amidst all the changes and chances of this mortal life, when friends and relatives were dead and gone, and the world without was cold and blank—to requite him for his truth and devotion to one friendless girl, rescued from a state of misery, in the extremity of her greatest need, neglected and alone!

"I can only say," mused Snipe, "that had Ned Walford read this honest outpouring of a true woman's heart, and not thought a second time before he gave her up—I would—yes, I'd have cut his acquaintance, and voted him among

those who, as Jack Falstaff says, ‘have hearts in their bellies no^{ab} bigger than pins’ heads.’”

* * * * *

“ Certainly,” he continued musing, “this is no proof we are wrong—no proof of ‘conduct irreproachable’—no proof of ‘spotless innocence,’ ‘perfect virtue,’ and all that. Still, there is something genuine in the letter—and I do, in my heart of hearts, admire the girl!”

This being the impression which Alice Hengen, even by her letter, had produced on a man as wary and unsentimental as Tom Snipe, Tom was no sooner closeted in Mr. Buxton’s back-parlour, than he found that the spell of the charmer had fallen upon Buxton, too—yes, and even Mrs. Buxton, in spite of her “proper pride;” which made the good man rather uncomfortable at first in the hospitality he had offered—even Mrs. Buxton, who had told him “never again, the longest day he had to live, to bring any such characters to her house”—even that lady found the frostwork of her prudery melted: and she had softened into a true believer in the innocence of her guest, and ended by making her husband almost ashamed of the part he had taken in preventing two young people from being happy for life.

“ Certainly,” said Buxton, “I cannot blame

myself, Mr. Snipe, for endeavouring to save a young man of family and fortune from being made the dupe—for so it would prove nine times out of ten—of some designing woman picked up at a way-side inn; but, really, in this case, Mr. Walford may go further and fare worse. Her nature is so artless, and with almost a childlike simplicity—evidently a lady in distress—delicately nurtured and brought up; and most devoted to him. So now I begin to have my misgivings, and can well-nigh say with Macbeth,—

‘I am afraid to think what I have done;
Look on’t again I dare not.’

The most painful part is,’ continued Buxton, ‘she has not the slightest doubt but Walford will marry her—for, as to women, when they love they trust; and it would break her little heart to tell her. Really I do wish I were well quit of all this ‘interesting affair!’’

“Yes,” said his wife, “I am always telling Buxton that he never is happy unless he is hampering himself with some queer affair or other.—Why in the world doesn’t he mind his shop; and, as to those silly young men, let their own fathers and mothers look after them, instead of us?”

“ You mean to say,” interrupted Tom Snipe, laughing, “ that no man’s pie is free from his ambitious fingers?”

“ That’s just it, Mr. Snipe. I don’t give people credit for all pure goodness—a restless, busybody spirit, or self-importance, is nine-tenths of such charity, very often.”

There is nothing in which a man is generally more shy or cowardly, than in being the one to break some most unpleasant news. So, Buxton suggested that, since ladies understood each other best, his wife should encounter all the swooning or hysterics in the course of the afternoon, meaning himself to go out for the day. But Mrs. Buxton, who in this respect took after her husband, cried out, “ No child of mine !”

It was decided at last that since Alice’s sister had proposed to receive her in London, “ pending all proper arrangements for the marriage”—poor, simple, confiding creatures!—the sooner they hastened her departure the better. Then, when fifty miles of good land lay between them, a letter could be written ; it would then only remain for poor Alice, like the Fair Penitent,—

“ To think on what was past and sigh alone.”

CHAPTER VI.

WHOLESOME TRUTHS, THOUGH RATHER LATE.

WE must return to Mrs. Walford, whose anxieties about the gentleman, like the anxieties of Hannah about the lady in this unhappy affair, were at this time of the most distracting character;—only the mother could hasten to the scene of action, but the sister not.

A communication from Dr. Tuckwell, the famous University Doctor of those days, had caused Mr. Walesby, the Vice-President, to desire that Walford should remain in his rooms two or three days longer, before he vacated, according to the sentence of the Common Room. It was, therefore, very natural that the fond mother should make her appearance at King's, and go at once to Mr. Walesby to learn the length and depth of her misfortune, almost as

soon as that gentleman could expect any acknowledgment of his letter.

Mr. Walesby was a kind-hearted man, and as little ossified in heart, or petrified in feelings, as you could expect of any man who had passed his life in these bleak latitudes, where all the light and sunshine of the more genial part of creation is forbid to melt the austerity of selfish man. Mr. Walesby also had, till late in life, a mother too. It matters not that she was the ancient-looking lady who once astonished all the Herodotus class, by putting her brown beaver bonnet into the room of her learned son at lecture time. It was well known that that son supported her out of his Fellowship, even as Corporal Trim exemplified “honouring his father and mother,” by “allowing them three halfpence a-day out of his pay, when they were growing old.”

Norman, and Milward, one of the most promising of the Scholars of King's, were breakfasting with Mr. Walesby when Mrs. Walford's intended visit was announced by a servant with a note.

“Really, this is too bad,” said Mr. Walesby, throwing the note to Norman to read. “Parents pet and pamper their sons till no vagary is too silly for their wild and unruly nature; and

then I have painful interviews and endless trouble, because I am obliged to rusticate them. However, I really do pity the poor lady. So, let us make haste, and get breakfast out the way, for there will be a sad scene, depend upon it. But," he said, lowering his voice to a confidential tone, "what is the general impression about Walford? There is no want of ability, and, it appears to me, much good feeling, in the youth."

"Walford appears to me to be an unhappy exemplification of 'the deceitfulness of riches,'" replied Norman.

"He has never learnt what we call at Winchester, manners," added Milward. "Still, he is being licked into shape; indeed, he is improving very fast: but, to use the popular phrase, 'he is the victim of a combination of most untoward and unfavourable circumstances.'"

"Exactly so," said Mr. Walesby. "Just what I thought. For want of whipping when a child, he is having the rubs of life a little late. Well, there's no helping it. But, really, this late adventure is a dreadful case. From something he let drop in the Common Room, which passed without remark at the time, I really suspect that he did intend to marry that barmaid."

"But some new light has been thrown upon this story," observed Milward.

"Indeed! what is that?"

"One of the county magistrates, a friend of the Proctor, called on Mrs. Winter, of the 'Stag,' at Woodstock, from whose house this elopement took place, and threatened to take away her licence if anything so disreputable occurred again."

"Well, and what did the old lady say? She is a worthy old soul. I have known her many years."

"Licence or no licence," she vowed she "would not 'put up with his talk of lures and decoys for young men of fortune—actually in her own house, for which she paid rent and taxes:' and, in short, there was so much detonating powder in her monosyllables, that the accuser became more deferential."

"And what came out?"

"If Mrs. Winter is to be believed, her barmaid 'is no barmaid at all, but a lady in distress'—'taken out of charity'—fool that she was to take her!—for she breaks more than her head's worth, and now has brought all Oxford about her ears — although, cautions against 'those impudent young Collegers' had

been the daily burden of her song.—These were the topics of her speech for the defence.”

“ A lady in distress? Very strange! Still, Mrs. Winter is not the woman to say so, if it were not true.”

“ She further declared that Alice Hengen’s father was as good as Edward Walford’s—aye, and better, too! being connected with the best of the Berkshire families.”

“ Old Walford was only a City Broker.”

“ Yes, Sir; so says Mrs. Winter: and Mr. Hengen, she declares, though late a station-master, was the son of an independent gentleman, and once a man of good estate.”

“ And, probably, came to the ground, like many other independent gentlemen—young Walford, to wit, I fear—simply because few persons know the use of money but those who have earned it.”

Here there was a pause. Mr. Walesby swept his hand across his forehead, as if in painful thought: as well he might, for Mr. Walesby had, at that time, a sister “out in the world.”

At last he said,—

“ Really, this is very painful. I have had thirty years’ dealings with spoilt boys and pa-

rents—for thirty years I have seen folly filtering through successive generations. Whether fools or knaves do more harm in this world, with me has often been a question. As to parents, ‘fond’ and ‘foolish,’ have long been convertible terms. Spoilt children, like young idiots, have really no right to be turned loose on the world without a keeper. But—the poor girl—what has become of her?”

“I hear, she is gone to her sister.”

“Bless me!—and that sister, perhaps, is a distressed lady, too?”

“She is some old lady’s companion in London. So, at least, said Mr. Buxton. You, probably, know, Sir, the kind part he has taken?”

Mr. Walesby once more was silent, and seemed deep in thought. He, too, had been a wild boy in his younger days. Report did say that he was, for two or three years, absent from the University—no one knew where—and that his reappearance and position in academical life were chiefly owing to the kind offices of the same superannuated old President, of whom we heard in the Common Room. So, there was a secret in Mr. Walesby’s history; and the blank in his annals had been filled up according to the imagination of every chronicler; though, every legend, however widely different, agreed in this,

—that they all placed one female figure very prominently in the foreground.

Secrets, however, are rarely kept for ever. The time comes when age is supposed to have passed an act of indemnity on our early failings; while “the good men do, lives after them,” and is mentioned to their honour long after their former selves are numbered with the past. Accordingly, it was rumoured that there had been an Alice adventure in Mr. Walesby’s history; and that the two years, long unaccounted for, had been honourably employed by one who ventured the sacrifice of all his prospects in life, rather than follow the too common fashion, at the first moment of perplexity, of “whistling” the poor bird of ruffled plumage most heartlessly “down the wind.”

Mr. Walesby had barely time to arrange with Norman to keep guard in the quadrangle, and to stay the ten-o’clock lecture from breaking in upon this serious conference, when Mrs. Walford was announced—a fine, dignified lady, with a venerable cast of features, composed and pleasing at all times, though now pale with deep and anxious thought. She met Mr. Walesby with much contention to control that quivering lip and faltering tone, which speaks the o’er-wrought heart; still, Mrs. Walford, in the presence of a

stranger, was not the person to commit herself with unavailing tears.

“She had come,” she commenced by saying, “feeling the recent occurrence quite an affliction, to hear the length and breadth of it, and all that devolved upon her as a mother, under circumstances so truly painful.”

“The affliction you are really suffering, allow me briefly to say, Mrs. Walford, is *the affliction of an only son*. A son and heir, or a favourite elder son, is, of course, much the same thing.”

“The temptations of College are very great.”

“The temptations in this case, Mrs. Walford, are from within, not from without.”

“But had my son been in the country —”

“The same thing, for want of anything better to do, might have happened in the country also: but with this great difference, much to the honour of Oxford—that here the youth was stopped in time to save him from an alliance you might not have admired; for, had your son been at home, you might have heard the news too late.”

Mrs. Walford paused, rather puzzled by these expressions—“An alliance,” did Mr. Walesby call it?—and did he say, “one not to be admired?” Well, well—perhaps these College gentlemen might have a very modest way of

expressing things to ladies: so she let that pass, and simply remarked,—

“But the disgrace of Rustication is very great: not a few about Richcourt—you can have no idea of the ill-natured people of our neighbourhood—will triumph in his fall.”

“You would say, rather, that, for the first time in your son’s life, the full weight of public opinion will be brought to bear as a check upon his wayward courses. Be it so. Nothing is more startling—nothing more wholesome—nothing so likely to make a youth awake from the dream of self-importance—all fawning, flattery, and delusion apart. We take to ourselves credit for having been instrumental in bringing such seasonable correctives to bear upon your son.”

“And is not this very severe?”

“Allow me to ask, Is not this very kind? Youth is buoyant and light-hearted to bear such trials—youth both claims and finds indulgence. More than one excellent member of society, in middle life, has thanked me for thus arresting him in a career of vice—for thus hurling him from the pinnacle of self-deceit, and for thus humbling him to a sense of his true position. And I must, in all candour, assure you, that never was such a lesson needed more than with the naturally-amiable and well-disposed—but at the

same time, the flattered and deluded—‘Heir of Richcourt.’”

“I must honestly confess, Mr. Walesby, that a very wise and excellent friend, who has known my son from his infancy, has been so candid as to say the same thing. Still, it is hard to think that kindness should have been an error in his education.”

“Pardon me, madam; kindness, as such, injures no one. I am well assured I am reasoning with a lady who looks to her Bible for her counsel—and let me ask, What are the two great points of the Christian system?”

“Self-denial and ——”

“And humility—self-knowledge, that is: not being puffed up by the mere accidents of birth and fortune, but bearing ourselves soberly according to our innate powers and moral worth. These are life-long lessons, which many a young man learns at Oxford, however little he carries away in Latin or in Greek.”

Mrs. Walford, after a moment’s silence, quoted meditatively,—“If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself.”

“In other words, If any man will go smoothly through this world, as an earnest of his fitness for the world to come, the first thing is that self-command—that self-mastery, which alone forbids

the sweets of the day to be purchased by the bitters of the morrow, and which alone enables the man, throughout all the hourly importunities of life, to say that one word, ‘No,’ to self and others.”

“ You surprise me, Mr. Walesby — you argue so exactly in the strain of my friend the Rector.”

“ That Rector’s name, if you please?”

“ The Reverend Henry Raymond.”

“ By reputation I know him well. You wonder at the identity of our views. All men blessed, as we have both been, with early discipline and early struggles — all public-school men, and men of our collegiate experience — reason, in this respect, the same.”

“ You really are wedded to the old, cruel system — a school of severity — a youth of hardship?”

“ The cruelty and rough usage is the abuse: five or six years of discipline — of the wayward will of man — while yet in its most yielding and pliant state — being bent, and trained to bend ever after to one inexorable rule of right — this is a system which would have saved many a rustication.”

“ Mrs. Walford hereupon,” said Mr. Walesby,

"looked grave and thoughtful; at length she made some remark, that showed me plainly that she thought only of the boy she had spoilt, and not at all of the poor girl thrown out of her situation, broken-hearted, and perhaps ruined for ever!

"This one-sided view of the case was rather too much for my patience—I felt nettled by it. I am rather used, as you may suppose, to the selfishness of parents; by which term I mean—that all-absorbing thought and engrossing interest in some refractory, priggish, and disgusting little urchin, which leaves no room for gratitude, or even justice, to fretted governesses, exhausted servants, or tutors, vexing their righteous souls. Accordingly, I was so unsympathising as to add,—

"There is, unfortunately, another aspect of the present question—the grave responsibility which attaches to "cruel kindness," not only as regards our own children, but also as regards others."

"There is a dreadfully artful young woman in this instance, I fear——"

"There is *a* young woman in this case, certainly; but that young woman had once a fond and loving mother, too—now reft of her tender care."

"I have naturally, Mr. Walesby, a difficulty in entering upon this subject; but surely nothing can excuse the conduct of——of that of which our present painful position is the result."

"But are you so sure, madam, that the art and the design is all on one side? What if it should prove that this poor girl is 'more sinned against than sinning?' I hear she is an orphan—forced by death of parents to go out in the world—that, therefore, the honourable addresses of a gentleman would seem perfectly natural to her, and not, as to a common servant, bear impropriety on the face of it!"

Mrs. Walford now became rather agitated, and evidently perplexed. She had come to Oxford—like most other parents—in hot haste, to throw the blame on any one thing or person, rather than on her own dear boy. She now seemed put upon her defence. The enemy had turned assailant, and truths the most poignant and piercing to one of her religious and conscientious nature were now rankling in her bosom. At length, being utterly puzzled to bring this unpleasant interview to any sensible conclusion, she said,—

"I really am quite at a loss what to do, or what principle to adopt, under all the exigencies of the present circumstances."

"The parting advice I would offer is,—to look within, and not without, for the real cause of troubles of this kind, and by the future to retrieve the past. Exhort and implore your son, with all the persuasiveness of a mother's love, to bend and submit to his present punishment, to resolve to read steadily at home with a tutor, and to return after Easter. 'The whips and scorns' of public opinion are a form of this life's punishments which no fond mother can avert. In your son's case, this chastisement has now—too late—begun. Whether blow upon blow will fall more or less frequently in after life, will depend greatly on the present crisis."

"And, after all, you leave me with the sad reflection, that the real cause of my elder son's career being so different from his younger brother's, rests very much with myself!"

"There is an ancient classic fable of one who sowed the soil with—DRAGONS' TEETH, and the crop that sprang up was not the less fatal because so different and difficult to identify;—a band of armed men, rife and ready to destroy!

"There is a power of illustration in that fable. Those DRAGONS' TEETH are SELFISH HABITS; those armed destroyers are the follies and the vices, which break out virulently in divers forms: sometimes, it may be, to prey upon some inno-

cent, unsuspecting, orphan-girl; and sometimes to uproot some fine ancestral home, and scatter to the very winds the painful earnings of a life by the folly or the passion of an hour.”

The first moment Mrs. Walford found herself alone after leaving Mr. Walesby, she felt exceedingly perplexed as to the position of “the poor orphan,” of whom, for the first time, she had heard as “the young lady forced by death of parents to go out in the world.”

Mrs. Walford was in a painful dilemma. To believe the lady in this case to be innocent, was to believe that the honour of the Heir of Richcourt was solemnly pledged to a girl, henceforth to be sneered at as a barmaid by the obnoxious Sir Buller and his circle — to believe that she was not innocent, was to view the case in a light too dark and degrading for a lady of her pure and exalted feeling even to suggest to her son.

Mrs. Walford one hour before had thought, like most other unhappy parents, that every one was conspiring to corrupt her son — that vice and folly were complaints he only could have by infection, while all others had them in the natural way : Mr. Walesby could not possibly have retaliated by a keener thrust, than when he suggested to this mother the picture of a mother-

less girl, suffering something deeper far than College punishment, and all from the wild and reckless character Mrs. Walford's life had been devoted to form.

This was especially painful to Mrs. Walford ; because, when we said that she was truly a religious woman, we intended something far more rugged and old-fashioned than much which passes current for religion at the present day. She placed no dependence on a sickly, sentimental state of feeling—no kind of reliance on keeping up a simmer of half-heated emotions ; but “doing as we would be done by,” and, “swearing to our neighbour and disappointing him not, though it were to our own hindrance,” were the plain principles of her daily conduct.

But Mrs. Walford was a good woman by the standard of this world, and nothing more. A well-balanced mind with womankind is very, very rare. One thing at a time is all they can allow to engross them. Mrs. Walford's soul was not so capacious, but the love and the interest of her dear Ned filled it all. Her parental vision had for years been so forcibly drawn in one direction, that there was now little chance of her seeing right or left. Therefore, to start off in a wholly new direction, at the casual suggestion of a possibility by Mr. Walesby

— to seek for what she would dread to find — to give shape and substance to a surmise which as yet had none — this was rather too original for a lady who had travelled so many miles with a mind running one way alone : namely, on the wickedness of Oxford, and all the snares and temptations which so cruelly beset her own dear boy.

But whatever qualms and uneasiness Mrs. Walford had begun to feel from the plain speaking of Mr. Walesby, received a very soothing opiate when she first had an interview with Tom Snipe. It was not that Snipe was so base as deliberately to poison Mrs. Walford's mind against Alice Hengen. No. Snipe never conceived it possible that Mrs. Walford would trouble herself about the cause, however innocent, of all her troubles : he therefore passed and glossed the matter over, rather by suppressing what was true, than by suggesting what was false ; and ending with an assurance that he had consulted with the very excellent Mr. Buxton, and had sent the lady to her friends, with a pretty ample compensation for all her troubles.

In one sense all this sounds true : two years' pay, and a saving of two years' labour in washing glasses and handing spirituous liquors to the customers of the "Stag Inn," Woodstock,

did seem a plausible compensation for a great deal of sorrow, if begun and ended in three short days.

But there is another view of this compensation. A pension may pay for a soldier's wound : a sense of honour is his balm—and he may limp along, if not quite as easily, the more proudly for his crutch. But no money can measure the throbings of the heart—there are inward wounds that never heal — venomous stings that ever rankle—heart-scars that woman will carry to the grave—when once she has awakened from her Elysian dream of life-long devotion and undying love, to feel her shrine profaned, her generous trust a weakness, and all the feelings woman holds most sacred wasted upon one who can selfishly betray.

Whether the poor girl was a willing party to this arrangement, or, indeed, whether she even accepted the terms at all, Mrs. Walford never asked. Still, we have no doubt, but had she only understood that her son's honour was liable to be compromised in the sale of a farm, or other matter of honest dealing, the same Mrs. Walford would have taken care that not the slightest breath of suspicion should sully the honour of Richcourt Hall. But, in the battle of life, a woman rarely gives her own sex

any quarter. When single, she will marry another's beau: when the mother of a family, every woman who crosses her in her hopes of aggrandisement for her son, is "an impudent, forward miss." Some such short appellation dispenses at once with the unpleasant duty of looking into the merits of a case, and honestly striking the balance between a less eligible daughter-in-law, or a false and dishonoured son.

We should have mentioned in our last chapter that Mrs. Walford took the opportunity of consulting Mr. Walesby as to the character of John Hackles. Her son had proposed to invite him to Richcourt, in the twofold capacity of tutor and of companion: for Hackles, at that time, was in difficulties—his friends being unable to continue remittances; and therefore he greeted as an escape from ruin an offer to continue his studies at Richcourt.

Mr. Walesby spoke so heartily and so emphatically of the superior influence which Hackles was calculated to exercise, that Mrs. Walford could not but receive the impression that Mr. Walesby appeared not very favourably disposed towards Snipe. The arrangement with Hackles was therefore completed, and Snipe was informed by a polite note that the companionship of a gentleman, more nearly the age of her son,

was deemed by Mrs. Walford most desirable, under the peculiar circumstances of the case.

This was a sad blow for Snipe. That his salary would be continued during the whole of Walford's stay at the University he had no reason to doubt. Still, he now saw the beginning of the end of his sinecure office as tutor. He had also reason to fear that the day was drawing near when the influence of men like Dick Cheston, flanked by such safe and steady-going characters as John Hackles, would worm themselves into his place, and he would be the first of the discarded favourites of Richcourt Hall. In the affair of Alice and the elopement Tom was conscious that he had rendered the family no little service. Indeed, Mrs. Walford had thanked him for the part he had taken. Still, Snipe was perhaps shrewd enough to know that there is one kind of service which usually proves a losing office—namely, when you have been privy to some grievous folly, and your name is associated with a sore subject, most galling to the pride of the person you have served.

From that visit to Mr. Walesby dates, in the history of Mrs. Walford, an altered feeling and a suspicion of Snipe. Snipe had humoured her weaknesses ; he had flattered her pride ; he had

even satisfied her reason : but—what is with woman more than all—he had never satisfied her intuitions.

And if these were the feelings with which she consented to replace the services of Snipe by those of John Hackles, nothing could have been more unfavourable to Snipe than the choice that was made. “There’s such divinity doth hedge a king,”—there’s such a light of truth and honesty that plays around a really healthful and a genuine nature, that Mrs. Walford felt at once that her son was submitted to the influences of a far more genial and improving character.

Mrs. Walford could not help reflecting from time to time on the high standard of discipline and moral worth which evidently prevailed in the mind of Mr. Walesby : and behold, the first specimen she had seen of the young men of the College fully realised the picture he had set before her. It was with feelings of admiration, dashed with sorrow and regret—it was with a melancholy pleasure, that she silently observed John’s energy and perseverance—the hours he would effectually, though playfully, detain her son from his sports ; and no sooner was Ned Walford gone —exulting in his escape—than the untiring

tutor would set to work to pursue those private studies, for which it cost him all this labour even to purchase the opportunity.

Mrs. Walford could not help expressing her feelings to her friend the Rector—that the lots of two youths and their early advantages should be so different!

“The question is,” replied her friend, “What are advantages?—God hath made all things double. He hath set the ‘outer man’ and the ‘inner man’ one against the other: so that that which is better for the one—what adds to our store, our facilities and external advantages—proves a diversion to the energies and a loss of power to the man.—You are a wicked unbeliever, Mrs. Walford,” said Mr. Raymond, with a playful tone and smile.

“ You must explain yourself, Mr. Raymond.”

“ You forget that there is one and the same law, that rules our conduct as regards ‘the world that now is,’ as well as ‘the world that is to come.’ You do not believe that ‘the kingdom of heaven is among us’—that we ‘must, through much tribulation, enter into’—be brought to fall in with, the one and only course in which we can work harmoniously in our present sphere of action. So, you are hourly letting fall expressions of surprise at the superiority of that

very condition of life which revelation, as well as experience, proves to be the best.

"Why is it the elder son who is rusticated—the elder son who was plucked—the elder son who was so nearly involved in a marriage you abhorred?—Did not the two boys start with equal promise? Your son Nat felt he had only himself to depend on, and had the remarkable *disadvantages* (?) of the kicks and cuffs of a public school whenever he deserved them; and the result is, that his bill of pains and penalties is paid; that of his elder brother to this hour remains—I know not when—to be discharged."

CHAPTER VII.

“COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS
BEFORE.”

THE troubles and turmoils of life seem to obey the law of storms at sea: our dearest friends in one degree of latitude may be tossed about on the very verge of destruction; while we, in another degree, may be sailing calmly and happily on our voyage, literally luxuriating in the serenity of our fortune.

On the eventful evening just described Hannah had gone quietly to bed, after planning all things requisite for a little change to the sea at Ramsgate; and her thoughts, never very long diverted from her sister Alice, had, as usual, pictured her at Woodstock, amidst all the common people at the “*Stag*,” and all the comicalities of the celebrated Mrs. Winter.

What if, by any of the mysteries of clair-

voyance, Hannah could have followed her sister amidst all the various perils of the elopement—the flight, the shattered vehicle, the Proctor, the bull-dogs, and, we had almost said, the gaol !

Mrs. Belmont had been going on much as usual. The same order of mendicants to visit the old lady, received the same sinister glances and sneers from Miss Hengen. The woman at the crossing, who came twice a-week to wash her long-haired lap-dog and take away the scraps, encountered the same kind of civilities, in a rougher shape, from cook. The Doctor came daily : if she was well, to keep her well ; if she was ill, to make her better. In fact, the old lady was regulated like a clock ; and the diversion of seeing the pleasant-looking man, and talking to him, was in itself a salutary stimulus. The Clergyman, also, had his regular days ; and though she was too good a Protestant to wish to receive absolution, still there was something in seeing him that would insidiously produce the same sense of security and dependence on her mind. It gave the old lady a satisfactory feeling, and as if her failings began to count anew from the last “comfortable visit.”

Hannah had just been regretting, with no little irritation, that while Mrs. Belmont—poor old lady !—was well, her very attentive relatives

would not let well alone. One or the other must always be persuading her to try such and such charming apartments in their own immediate neighbourhood. And when once they had her there, they did nothing but complain of the smallness of their income, and the largeness of their family ; and after that topic they would talk about making their wills, and say how wrong it was for any one, however young, to live without one.

“ The consequence is,” said Hannah, “ they bring on her dreadful nervous attacks. She can’t rest till she has tried at least to make her lawyer go tinkering at her will again—and then the idea of the will brings the dread of dying ; and she declares her sudden fortune is the cause of her being worried to death.

Hannah, therefore, was at this time casting about for some means of putting off one of these dreaded visits—a visit which naturally delivered Hannah into the hands of the Philistines ; because, however capable Hannah might be to take her own part, still, when brought into the enemy’s territory, with a whole family snubbing and cold-shouldering together, she felt that to live constantly with your quills up is no very comfortable state of existence.

“ I only wish, Doctor, something would

occur to put this off. There is not one of them at Ramsgate but would cashier me if they could."

"There is little danger of that, Miss Hengen; the old lady is very well aware that her life hangs on your kind and judicious care alone."

"My sister, Doctor, is my chief anxiety — and if she should leave her present situation —"

"Even that must not remove you from Mrs. Belmont's service: the case is imperative—any sacrifice must be made. Nay, nothing would Mrs. Belmont feel to be a sacrifice in your case, I am quite sure."

"Her means are abundant, no doubt; but do you think I could depend upon an invitation for my dear sister, supposing she should be for some months in want of a home?"

"Yes; I am sure you might depend on any arrangement requisite to ensure your continued attendance on my very excellent patient. It would not require a word from me."

However, Hannah, though somewhat reassured, could not help wishing for something to put off the much-talked-of "change to Ramsgate."—How often do our wishes come in a form that renders them a bane rather than a blessing!

We may say of the postman, as Horace says of Fate,—

“Æquo pulsat pede pauperum tabernas,
Regumque turres.”

With the same regulation pace and monotonously nervous rap he visits the nobleman in the Square or the coachman in the Mews; on he goes, scattering indifferently joy and sorrow in his track, bidding one heart leap with transport and another sink with grief.

What lady is there, old enough, at least, to be enmeshed in the complicated ties of this life, who has not one dear friend or relative whose letters she dreads to open?—This nervous tre-
mour with Hannah Hengen used at this time to be painfully experienced at the sight of a letter from her sister Alice. Many little things, though far too subtle to analyse, will often con-
spire to wind up our apprehensions to the highest pitch, at the very moment at which there is really some dread announcement to justify our fears.

It was quite natural that Hannah's mind should be in this ill-foreboding and prophetic state, and that she should be the first to meet the postman at the door. No sooner had she taken the letter in her hand, than the shaky and almost illegible direction, strange paper, and the

Oxford post-mark, all made the anxious sister impatient to break the seal: when, as usual, the tantalising interruption of,—“A penny on this letter to-day, and twopence left yesterday,” tended to rouse her from her reverie to the realities of life.

The contents of the letter may easily be conjectured; though so difficult is it for an excited mind to tell a plain story, that Hannah’s ingenuity was tasked to make head or tail of anything so unintelligible as an arrest by Proctors of a full-grown man and woman in this land of liberty, and her innocent sister being indebted to the kind offices of an Oxford tradesman to save her from a gaol, and to afford her the shelter of his home!

However, Hannah, as soon as she was sufficiently composed, proceeded to extract from this letter such statements as she could understand; nor was she long in arranging and digesting certain startling facts, which were frightfully plain and glaring, amidst all the mysteries of this truly perplexing case. It was evident enough,—

1. That her sister had been eloping with a young Oxonian on a dark winter’s night.—Nothing could be more evident, and nothing more perilous than that!

2. That her sister flattered herself she was that night on her way to be married, and further intimated that, of course, it was only a matter of time and arrangement for her dear Ned to marry her still.

Hannah thought it was well that her silly sister was stopped in good time that evening; and as to the expected marriage, she would believe it when the fond couple were rung out of church, and not before.

3. That Alice was writing from the house of Mr. Buxton at Oxford, her retreat to Mrs. Winter's being irrecoverably cut off. It was also most evident of all things that, what to do next, or where to go, she could not tell.

This was what the letter did contain, which was, of course, the first thing to decipher: but Hannah knew that letters are no less significant when read with an eye to the things that are left out; and she could not but observe that there was no mention made of her sister's lover having ever been near her, or of any communication whatever. But, as if to make the sad case complete and consistent as a good average chapter of this life, Hannah dashed down the letter, and exclaimed, — “I thought as much! — our own kith and kin are always left to help us out of those straits and difficulties which others, ten

times more dear and devoted — as we are the fools to believe them — have been so loving as to let us in!"

If Hannah Hengen could have rushed away to her helpless sister, and by her own resistless energies have rescued the injured maiden from her pitiable and dependent state — aye, and taken summary vengeance on her pretended lover, Proctors, bull-dogs, and all — never was there a woman less likely to lean on another's arm so long as she could raise her own. But the days of heroism have passed away. We fight no longer with steel, but gold. Mightier far than a Maid of Saragossa or a Joan of Arc must that woman be who could wield the Paddington officials at her will without money to pay the Oxford fare. The eagle will scream defiance as it breasts the fury of the storm : but still falls powerless when it dashes at the bars of its iron cage. Hannah's free and dauntless spirit surged like a billow in her heaving breast ; till, gradually, there stole over her that cold calculation of pounds and pence, with the cruel reflection that the poor companion must deny herself the luxuries of a noble spirit, and submit to be trampled on only because she was poor !

Mrs. Belmont wondered where her companion was gone — while Hannah, unconscious of

the flight of time, read and re-read the unhappy letter, formed plans, only to find them madness—"resolved and resolved," and, after all, awoke, pale and cold as marble, from her reverie, to a sense that she was the same Hannah Hengen, in the same old lady's service, checked and straitened in her wishes and her ways—all just the same as before.

But, often among our greatest troubles, one little accident of our fortunes will sometimes fix the keenest pang—so was it with Hannah, when the thought came over her that Mrs. Belmont's generosity was her only hope. And Hannah, with all her faults, had a soul above the little and the mean. In her heart, she loathed the starveling flock who came chirping around the old lady in the sunshine of her fortunes; and she shrank sensitively from the thoughts of any other dependence than a fair day's wages by a fair day's work.

However, repeated ringing was heard—Susan screaming to Betty to call Miss Hengen, and the voice of the old lady above them all, as she stood dangerously tottering at the top of the stairs, and crying, "Oh! what can be the matter? Come, Hannah, my dear child, come and tell me!"

This soon brought Hannah to the old lady's

side, unconscious she had yet the appalling letter in her hand—and equally unconscious that Mrs. Belmont was taking that letter from her. Soon she found herself ministering to a slight fit of hysterics, and reviving in the old lady sufficient strength for the explanations that must follow.

"It is something about your dear sister—I am sure it is," said the old lady, nervously and passionately. "Oh, dear—I am so agitated! Now, now—sit down and read me all about it, and then we will see what we can do."

To Mrs. Belmont, old as she was, a love-story was at all times as good as a feast. As to any little exciting adventure, bringing in its train and consequences anything to plan, anything to talk of, and anything to do, this afforded the very stimulus and interest for which old age craves, but craves in vain. Add to this, the well-known names of Woodstock, Mrs. Winter's inn, and Sister Alice, had always been the dream-land to which Mrs. Belmont's thoughts were ever flying off; and, when once they had flitted so far and left reality behind them, there they would amuse themselves, shifting and changing all the pieces, and charmingly disposing of Sister Alice, as she resolved would be for the best. For, Hannah being daily at her wits' ends to find something to amuse the old lady, had, by degrees, made her

quite familiar with all the scenes and characters of Sister Alice's situation. Mrs. Belmont, therefore, was in ecstasies at the thought of seeing Alice at last, and forthwith gave Hannah instructions to send money for her journey, and to bring her with all haste, to remain as long as she pleased, in London.

All that day she did nothing but talk about when the wedding would take place—of the horrid, meddling, disagreeable people who prevented such things—as also of the wedding clothes that the dear child would want—and thence she digressed to speak of what she herself would put on for the occasion.

When Hannah spoke deferentially of the intrusion or the trouble that she should give, the old lady replied,—

“ Trouble? Nonsense, child!—don’t talk about trouble! The house is so large, it feels quite dull. As to my relations, I don’t want them—I hate people who only come for what they can get. But I have long felt an interest in your sister—I have long wished that something would happen to bring her here to keep you company, and set your mind at ease: for I can see that you are never comfortable while she is out of your sight.—But, you’re sure this young Oxonian will marry her, after all?”

Hannah made some equivocal reply.

"Well; you say she is very pretty, and that goes a long way towards it. And if there has been a little opposition—why, I have always observed that it is sure to make young people ten times more in love than ever they were before."

Mrs. Belmont was that morning in a transport of delight.—The Doctor came and found all her complaints better, of which the old lady had a pretty good variety ; and so refractory were they in their nature, that what was good for one was bad for another. "We are going to have a wedding in the house, Mr. Finner," she exclaimed, "and you must give me something to keep me up for the occasion ; though, to say the truth, the very thoughts of such a thing have made me well already."

Before long her affectionate niece, Mrs. Bayfield, was announced ; and Mrs. Bayfield, Hannah always declared, was one of the most audacious instances of what she called "the family resurrection." Hannah did not feel much disposed to be present on this occasion. She well knew that the whole story of her sister's invitation would come out, and she felt acutely at being for the first time open to any sneering look or insinuation from Mrs. Bayfield—of playing the same game, or feathering her own nest, like the rest of them.

It was one of the artifices of Mrs. Belmont to turn her little weaknesses into weapons of defence. "It is very odd," said Mrs. Bayfield, "but I am rarely ten minutes in the room before she has a little fit—wants sal volatile—must ring for Miss Hengen, or the like." The truth was, this was Mrs. Belmont's only possible resource to cut short the long catalogue of unforeseen expenses, expensive family, and all the other topics of misery with which the old lady's money had made her dreadfully familiar.

Having in this way got rid of Mrs. Bayfield, when Hannah returned into the room she said,—

" You have heard me say, child, that when people are talking to me, I do not so much listen to their words, but I look in their faces, and mark their hesitation, or any hollow tones ; so, when I told all about your sister's coming, Mrs. Bayfield said, ' Yes—yes, something to divert you ; ' but when I suddenly looked up, she was pulling such a face ! "

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SISTERS MEET AT LAST.

It is time to return to Alice Hengen.

When Harry Bertram came back to Ellangowan, after being lost for some twenty years, poor Dominie Sampson, forgetting the lapse of time and the growth of character, thought he must go on at the same page of the grammar at which the child Harry had left off.

However laughable the error, in divers forms we all are guilty of the same ; we all picture to ourselves the absent as we left them—or, at least, it requires an effort to replace the old impression we so naturally retain, by one that reflection would suggest.

Accordingly, when Hannah, at the Paddington station, was anxiously eyeing the impatient and bustling crowd which, all in a moment, on

the arrival of the train, was crowding the platform, quite still and blank before—her eye glanced once or twice past the real Alice Hengen before she identified a certain very interesting-looking young woman, though far less fashionable than any London lady, as her dear sister Alice, whose personal appearance Hannah had always studied as scrupulously as her own.

Cheap Woodstock fashions—a choice limited by her little wages and Mrs. Winter protesting against what she called “finery,” as “never coming to any good,” and as utterly unworthy of the character of “her young women at the ‘Stag’”—all this, added to the fact that it is only “when the mind’s at ease the body’s delicate,” a heavy heart within making us very indifferent to the gaieties without—had resulted in a costume which, though passable at Woodstock, and not devoid of taste, seemed very anomalous to one used to town.

Hannah, for the moment, forgot her greater trouble in the less. “My dear child!” she exclaimed, “however came you to make yourself such a fright? Yes, and how pale and thin you are! Why,” she had almost added, “you have lost all your good looks,” when the same sweetly-interesting cast of features once more revived Hannah’s by-gone associations, and she

said, "Never mind, dear ; let us collect your boxes, and we will see what we can contrive before I present you to Mrs. Belmont."

Immediately, with the help of Mrs. Belmont's servant, whose looks she dreaded to meet—so certain was she of reading something very depreciating, as if her sister were a mere candidate for a twelve-pounds-a-year-and-tea-and-sugar situation—Hannah proceeded to keep a watch upon the luggage, though ever and anon she heaved a heavy sigh—a sigh laden with the fear that no young man of family had ever honestly intended to take home to a country seat such a costume as she now, to her dismay, was looking on. And what should she do with Mrs. Belmont? What, if she encountered any of that lady's loving relatives on the stairs?

With Mrs. Belmont, good looks, an elegant style, and lady-like appearance, were everything; more especially now that she was looking forward to feast her eyes upon a bride! Oh! dear, what should she do?

However, as Alice was really overcome with all the recollections of the past, and with the warm gush of sisterly love at the present—Hannah had a sufficient excuse for leading Alice at once to her own room, before presenting her to Mrs. Belmont. With such an opportunity

for the rapturous display of her tact and talent in setting forth Alice to the best advantage, Hannah, having a very interesting kind of beauty and much natural elegance to work upon, soon made Alice sufficiently like her proper self to be introduced to the old lady, who had been ringing and fidgeting with message after message “not to mind her,” but to come at once into the drawing-room.

The old lady had put on her best things, too. She, also, was desirous of making a favourable appearance, and carrying on a little rivalry of attractions and best looks. The idea of the wedding had taken possession of her mind, and the old lady was quite young again for the time, and entered into the bridal preparations with all that love of dress which is an undying passion with womankind, and which, if ever a little in abeyance, the very idea of a wedding never fails to revive.

No sooner did Hannah bring her sister into the room than Mrs. Belmont received her, if not quite with open arms, yet certainly with open eyes. She had been looking forward like a child to a playfellow or a toy; and as Alice seemed the more interesting for being pale and nervous, and all the more like the bride of the strangest adventures, Mrs. Belmont indulged in all the

pleasures of tenderness and pity. Indeed she was so truly kind and sympathetic, that Alice felt quite overpowered—as if she had found a very mother to comfort her after all her troubles and distress.

Just at this moment, Mrs. Belmont's trusty maid, Bridget, came up quickly, to say that Mrs. Bayfield sent her love to her aunt, and would just step in to see her.

"No—no—Bridget! not for the world! You know what to say—‘Engaged.’ Yes; and I am much better engaged, too; and, what is more, if not one of them ever comes again for a week, the better pleased I shall be." And then turning round she said, eagerly,—

"Mind, Hannah, dear; you must take care of me—on no account let one of my loving relations come near me: my nerves, my complaints, and all that—for, you know what to say—will not allow of any visitors till after the wed—; that is, not for the present, I mean."

The old lady had too much reserve and delicacy of feeling to appear to enter too suddenly into the affairs of her visitor: still, the wedding was uppermost, and she felt it hard to keep that topic back. Indeed, the first moment she was alone with Hannah, she began to ask for far more information than even Hannah had time

to glean. Poor Hannah! every such question went to her very heart. Who is there but has, on some anxious occasion, felt probed to the very quick by sanguine inquiries about the When and the Where of some critical event, which he is afraid to confess may never happen at all?

However, after dinner, Hannah plainly saw that such curiosity could keep no longer. The old lady had begun by noticing the little ornaments and other articles that Hannah had evidently lent her sister. From that specious prelude she proceeded to say, that there was no place like London for shopping; and that, she supposed, only the last season's fashions ever got as far as Woodstock: and, after kindly proposing to Hannah to go shopping next day, she glided gracefully, with some sly innuendo, to speak of the peculiar description of outfit which, she had the pleasure of hearing, would be most acceptable on the present occasion.

This led to many questions or surmises about the gentleman;—when he was expected in town—of his country, friends, family, brothers and sisters—ending with, “I need not ask if he is a fine, handsome young man: for, he must be all that is charming in your eyes, Miss Hengen—that is quite natural, of course.”

By letting Mrs. Belmont, with only a little assistance, have all the talk to herself, the two sisters contrived to pass away the time till the old lady retired for the night ; though Hannah, as she sat by, winced acutely at every word of Mrs. Belmont's kind, happy schemes — sorely convinced that it only tended to one sweeping disappointment, which the old lady's garrulity would ever after forbid the companion for a moment to dismiss from her irritated mind.

But when Mrs. Belmont had been assisted to bed, talking of the shopping and the wedding to the very last moment, we cannot attempt to describe the first quiet hour between the two sisters : still less the sanguine hopes, the confiding love, and attachment of Alice ; the cold suspicion, the utter hopelessness, and the misgivings of Hannah's sickened and world-weary spirit.

Alice talked and talked, till the candles burnt low and the quiet of the streets spoke alike of the lateness of the hour ; while Hannah listened, in thoughtful silence : and the longer she listened, and the more she heard of the ways of the lover, and how his attentions took holiday, like himself, all the long vacation — the less she believed.

The ingenious excuses by which Alice ex-

plained the impossibility of his seeing, or even writing to her, after that eventful evening, seemed like the fond delusion of a mind diseased. At last, Hannah's feelings were those of utter despair of arriving at any other conclusion, than that the dear girl had been well-nigh the victim of a heartless young *roué*. And as to any marriage in prospect, Hannah dared not—she could not yet summon the courage to encounter that sudden collapse of a fond woman's soul—that death-like blanching of the cheek and glazing of the eye, which follow that stunning blow which one word of doubt, at such a moment, will send home like a shot to a poor girl's heart.

True as it is, that at such soul-stirring moments our own feelings expand to a world-wide importance, Time, inexorable Time, and the ebbing tide of human feeling, claim at last to dull the sense, and end the most engrossing consultations. The brain grows weary of its whirling thought—the heart grows feeble in its pulses—and nature craves repose. One half of our time, rich and poor are much alike—whether for the victims of man's unkindness, or for the sons of painful toil: a season there is, ever mercifully recurring as a foretaste of that last long sleep, “where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.”

Hannah listened. A calm observer could have seen the compressed lip, the fixed, staring look, and the vengeful mood, at one time—as also the eye, pearly with softness, and the head, drooping with pity and affection, at another. A thoughtful observer might have found a meaning in her silence, and have filled up with words of burning indignation many a blank, when Alice seemed to pause for a reply: neither would such a one have failed to have interpreted—as Alice took her candle to depart—that convulsive clasping to her bosom and that kiss and blessing all in one, with which Hannah plainly recorded her heartfelt wish, though she dare not utter it, “God bless you; I fervently pray to-morrow’s post may prove all true!”

CHAPTER IX.

TROUBLE UPON TROUBLE.

WHEN one intense and abiding sorrow takes possession of the soul, the consequences are serious both to body and to mind—the brain withholds its vital fluid from the body, the body returns but feebly its tribute to the brain. Therefore, one way that Providence designs for lightening our troubles, is to show below the depth we fear a darker and a deeper still.

To the exile from his native land, the whole world is at first blank and dreary—he maps it all in the rayless and unbroken monotony of gloom; but long before he has landed, the suspicious pirate-looking craft that follows in his wake, the hurricane that drives them from their course, or the failure of their stores, all tend many times to say, “ You have cares and trou-

bles as great, or greater, than the one you have been brooding over:" and thus the heart is relieved by the very diversity of its shocks.

Hannah saw further into the present troubles than did Alice. To Alice it was natural to lean upon Hannah: she literally "believed in" Hannah, as one whose energy and invention were never without resource. But Hannah's service in the house of Mrs. Belmont, and Hannah's experience in the jealousy of that lady's family and connexions, had plainly told her that "beggar my neighbour" was not too unfeeling a game even for a "united and friendly family circle." How slight, therefore, was the hope for her—a lone and friendless woman, without claim, connexion, or dependence on any human being—to make her way in her present or any future situation, with so exclusive an interest combined against her! No. The truth had gradually stolen upon her,—that this world is one jealous monopoly—all its benefits for "founder's kin"—that beauty causes jealousy, talent envy, superiority hate, and that nothing but the tamest and the most spiritless mediocrity, in nine families out of ten, will fulfil all the conditions essential to the prosperity of the lady companion.

We are not justifying Hannah's state of

mind: we are only describing it.—The law of this world is, that “the meek shall inherit”—shall have the better lot on—the “earth.” The law of this world is, that the “humble shall be exalted”—the high-minded put low—that human nature shall resist the pretensions of a Hannah, and rather yearn towards the lowness of an Alice. The law of this world is, that “he that *will*”—that is, he that is always in a state of mind to “lose his life,” to sacrifice anything he lives for, “shall gain it”—he shall enjoy far more on the balance than selfishness could have clutched; whereas the mind set upon self shall be thwarted at every move. This law, or tendency of things, is old as the world—“the memory of man goeth not contrary”—only people will perversely read the Gospel with the least possible reference to this life present.

It was natural, therefore, that Hannah Hengen should feel that the world’s stream set dead against her—as if society were combined against woman-kind. She had even been heard to say that, unless born to affluence, she pitied every female child that was born into the world.

She stole softly, as usual, to the bedside of Mrs. Belmont, to take her last look, for fear—so critical seems the dead of night for the aged—any sudden change should have come over

her one and only friend in this world — and as she stood, shading the light of her candle with her hand, she envied the aged sleeper her soft and composed expression — inwardly ejaculating,—

“ Ah, my poor, dear old lady ! Pity 'tis, there is so little hope of your generous heart being gladdened with the pleasure of doing good in your own little interesting way. And yet, should all prove well, how complete were the arrangements ! — complete, as in a fairy tale, for gilding with a brighter sunshine my sister's happiest hour ! Here is the elegant home — the carriage — the *trousseau* — the old lady as the nearest friend — yes, all worthy of an alliance with the Heir of Richcourt — and can any envious fate deny us ? If he did but follow her to London, how satisfactory, in all its parts, the reception the old lady would enable us to give him ! God bless her, dear old soul ! ”

Hannah, about one in the morning, lay down to rest : yes, “ she lay down to rest ” — and happy may you think yourselves, my fair sisters, when, with a merry “ Good night ! ” to loving relatives, and almost impatient of the hours that separate you from the renewed joys of the morrow, you lie down with that best of opiates — a heart in unison with all the world.

But, fitful and restless were the slumbers of Hannah Hengen. Fierce indignation with Walford, as the cause of all her sister's misery, was battling, with impatience at her own hard lot — and when, at last, her spirit yielded, from the very intensity of its energies, she bedewed her pillow with tears of pity and tenderness for “that poor, dear child, Alice”—her eyes closing, like the criminal's, with a dreadful apprehension of the doom that awaits for the morrow.

Hannah had not been asleep above four hours, when her distracted brain became suddenly more and more confounded from certain groans and stifling sounds which met her ear; and which, as usual, formed a diversion and a part of her troubled dreams: till, the same sounds roused her to a sense of reality, and she was in one moment at the side of Mrs. Belmont's bed.

The old lady had a seizure — spasms, difficulty of breathing, and strong inward pains, were the most prominent symptoms of her complaint.

Hannah saw in a moment all that could possibly be done; and calling Alice, as well as the servants, to her assistance, set about the promptest measures of relief. The energies of such a woman had just now a worthy sphere. Mr. Finner came only to find his remedies all

anticipated : and declared to Mrs. Bayfield, and other members of the family, that, but for Miss Hengen's promptitude, he had found his patient at that moment no more !

Hannah cast a significant glance at Mrs. Bayfield, as much as to say, " You will like me all the better for that, no doubt."

" And this *young woman?*" said Mrs. Bayfield, with a cynical expression.

" Is my sister," replied Hannah ; with one of those looks which never failed to quicken the heart-beats of any impertinent inquirer.

" Is my aunt — my aunt, of course, is not in possession of — is not sensible, Mr. Finner ?"

" She is at present drowsy, and the brain is clouded ; but if all goes well, that may pass off."

" Then, since she is not now sensible — as an elder member of the family, I consider it my duty to take up my abode in this house from — from — for the present."

" Mrs. Bayfield," said Hannah, with a tone and manner which was a very *cartel* of defiance, " you will do no such thing. Your presence, as Mr. Finner knows, was always productive of more fits than equanimity in Mr. Finner's patient. I, therefore, consider it my duty to protect her from a source of irritation,

as long as there is reason to expect her recovery.”

Mr. Finner, knowing which side his bread was buttered, and feeling that, as he was a married man with a family, to take the part of the poor companion against a lady was not very politic, took his hat and rose to go, saying,—

“I will look in again this afternoon, but I must now be off at once.”

“And Mrs. Bayfield will accompany you,” said Hannah, opening the door with an expansion of her figure enough to sweep the little waspish figure of Mrs. Bayfield and Mr. Finner out at once.

“Then I shall go at once to the family solicitor,” exclaimed Mrs. Bayfield, indignantly.

“Then you will do perfectly right, Madam; and when you have arranged with the family solicitor it will be quite time enough for me to make suitable arrangements for the intended visit of Mrs. Bayfield.”

During all this stormy conference Alice stood by, utterly bewildered and amazed at the bold defiance and the daring of her sister; while the said “elder member of the family” seemed to shrivel before the blast, and slunk out of the

house, feeling much smaller in her clothes than when she came in.

The fear and trembling caused by this personal encounter to the agitated nerves of Alice had, for the moment, proved a counter-irritation to the feelings before strung up to the highest pitch, when she was startled from her confusion by the postman's rap.

Hannah, hushed in the very whirlwind of her passion, stood like marble, intensely eager, as Alice received a letter—the letter from Oxford, penned, as we described, by Mr. Philip Buxton. Alice tore it in her agitation, and was soon lost in its contents. There was no need for Hannah to ask her the contents—her eye swam from line to line, her breast heaved like a billow from the commotion within; till at last she looked round, reeled, and would have fallen, but dropped, convulsively sobbing, on her sister's bosom.

“Courage—courage! Rouse yourself, my own dearest!” Hannah exclaimed. “We have more troubles than one to bear up against—all our energies are wanted about our dear, good friend. All is not lost if she does but recover: otherwise, these last few minutes have sealed our fate.—If once these pitiful creatures can rifle her stores with the law upon their side, they

will retaliate upon me, and turn us both into the streets."

As to the letter, Hannah's indignation had been too lately exerted against one party, to be suddenly fired against another; and before she could gather more than a general idea of the cruel disappointment she had anticipated, the ringing of a bell reminded her of the overwhelming issues of life and death. By all these conflicting emotions, stunned and confounded, she hurried away, comforting and half-supporting her stricken sister as she went, to the sick-bed of Mrs. Belmont.

CHAPTER X.

TOO SMOOTH TO BE DESIRABLE.

ONE month from the events of the last chapter had passed away. Walford was quietly pursuing his studies at Richcourt Hall. He had by this time got over the unpleasantness of meeting every one of his friends and acquaintance, high and low.

Old Richard at the Lodge had uttered his condolence and honest impatience that “the Masters up at College should have been so regularly down on Mr. Edward, and not passed it over a little milder.”

Sir Buller had thrown all his feelings of exultation into his looks at their first meeting, and nothing more remained to follow—while most of the other family men—young ladies and gentlemen included—had with more or less plea-

santry or sympathy, said, “Fie! Fie!” and so the nine days of the wonder having passed away, all parties seemed agreed to think and talk of something else.

John Hackles could not but be surprised that all the troubled waters should have so soon run smooth; and that already Walford was enjoying his life-long sunshine of courtesy and smiles. More than one letter, we may be sure, had by this time arrived, both from the broken-hearted Alice and her indignant sister—letters of fond incredulity, tenderness, and love—letters imploring an explanation; followed by remonstrance from both the sisters, rising in the scale of severity, until at length Hannah’s burning resentment had exhausted all its fire.

And was Ned Walford so hard-hearted as not to be moved at all?

Not one of these letters was Ned Walford, the guilty cause of so much misery, ever allowed to see or hear of. For all he knew to the contrary, the fifty pounds—“above two years’ wages”—were accepted as in full discharge of all claims and damage done. Neither had his mind remained wholly unbiassed by that most unfavourable impression relative to Alice Hengen which evidently prevailed in all the University—that, without investing the barmaid

of the “Stag” with some little romance or interest, the bait was too old to be worth trying by so practised a hand as Mrs. Winter.

Mrs. Walford had been warned by Snipe to keep a watch upon the post-bag; and it was not very difficult to select the only letters that bore the least appearance of being written from Alice or her friends. The first letter, by Alice’s own hand, Mrs. Walford had herself opened, to obviate any mistake about the writer; and though prejudiced, as most mothers are, against “those shamefully artful creatures” who lead their sons astray, she was not sorry to close the letter, and to spare herself the danger of knowing rather more than her conscience would allow her to pass over without some serious inquiry into the fate and fortunes of some other person’s child besides her own.

These letters, therefore, however fraught with “thoughts that breathe and words that burn,” were sent to the solicitor’s office, and there opened, with a heap of other letters, serving only, like love-letters generally, to make fun for articled clerks. The only answers they received were those dry replies, “for self and partner,” which always convey the notion that a man must turn off the main between the fingers and the heart before he can possibly indite a proper lawyer’s letter.

"Then, what a lucky fellow was Ned Walford ! Fenced about and surrounded by such friends as these—by a mother to descry what was in the least unpleasant, a lawyer to ward off all that could ruffle the even *tenor* of his ways, and a circle of friends to flatter and to smile, where a poor fellow like Hackles would have had some home-thrusts and home-truths to the full measure of his disgrace.—When thus wealth can avert, in some sort, the pang of conscience, and keep the burning glow of crimson from the cheek, who shall deny the mighty privilege of coming into the world as the favoured heir of a great estate!"

If men would rationally study the Book of Life — pre-eminently claiming to be so called because it comprises the secret of this life as part and parcel of the life to come — they would not reason thus ; they would say, "What shall it profit" Ned Walford, though he gain an estate as wide as "the whole world," "if he lose" the "soul" of a generous, noble nature, to enjoy those only pleasures which belong to beings above the level of the brutes ? And what should "he give in exchange," for the soul to enjoy them ? But no : the popular notion of Christianity is, that there is a certain state of happiness to be won, and a certain state of torture to be avoided,

to which such precepts exclusively apply, and that as to being also true of all noble and exalted manhood in this life present, there is no kind of affinity between them.

Never mind, my worthy friend, John Hackles, you were reared in a far rougher and more bracing school. Had any one concealed from you the fact that you had been the means of throwing a poor motherless girl out of her home, nerveless and disqualified for earning her own livelihood more, you were not the man to have thanked them for their pains. Your noble heart would have claimed to have redressed the wrong yourself had done — aye, and by a life of tenderness and self-sacrifice, your honest soul would have emerged even fairer and purer for the stain which, in thoughtlessness, it had contracted, but in deliberate honour had blotted out.

Look on this picture and on that, my friends. We all love wealth — but, is there not in the just economy of this world a principle of compensation? Is it not improving, sometimes, to check ourselves in the torrent of our worldly wishes, and calmly to consider what other things are the almost inevitable concomitants and consequences of that tempting wealth we all so naturally desire?

Walford, therefore, is a man we pity, how-

ever heartily we condemn him. We freely enter into the spirit of that thoughtful man who said, “Pity the sorrows of the poor rich;” and if any of our readers — men who, beginning life with a scanty competency — men of that class which has always a struggle to keep afloat, yet never sinking, but is still goaded on by a certain cat-in-a-corner conviction that their only chance is to face the difficulty from which they cannot fly — if any such hardy Trojans think that we are too indulgent, let him only consider, if he cannot say,—“This is but a picture of what I might be;” supposing, only, at that time of life when the spirits are most mutinous, the head most giddy, and the whole man most under a mistake, the elastic pressure of self-restraint had found a golden valve, at the very moment it were bearing healthfully on the whole machinery of life.

However, there is no cheating Providence. Little kindness is it to save us from the premonitory twinges, whether in body or in mind — designed, as those twinges are, to warn us that all is not sound within.

We are led into these remarks because, in the studies *now* pursued, both Edward Walford and John Hackles were apparently “sowing” both alike. But, at a nearer view, wide, indeed, was the difference. It was virtue enough for

Walford that, with more or less energy on the part of his friend and tutor, his mind was riveted to the page from which, of its own truant tendencies, it had soon flown far away to the trout-stream or the covers.

No thoughtful looker-on could avoid this view of the case—still less avoid being warmed in heart and feeling as he beheld the other toiling to the very limits of his brain-power and his strength—his stimulus and incentive being that he might one day nestle down with his unprotected sister in some snug abode of his own earning, with some sanguine plans for “making Truth and Righteousness flourish out of the earth.”

We have nothing more that can either edify or amuse to relate of this part of Walford’s fortunes, save that Hackles was at last successful with his pupil, and that Walford returned to College very much humbled in his own opinion, and at the earliest practicable examination passed, and took his degree.

As to Hackles, the part he had borne in Walford’s success was not unknown in the College—a man who has any really good stuff in him is soon marked there. Neither can we forget the sympathy and kind impatience that

was expressed by other reading men, his competitors for College honours — “that,” as Norman expressed it, “that good-for-nothing lout, Walford, should be allowed to discharge the pregnant soul of a fine fellow like Hackles of half its fire.”

There was also no little College pride in Hackles’ prospects in the class-list. Wrightson of Balliol, at the same time, was at the height of his fame, and more than once had it been observed that though Wrightson, from earlier advantages, had beaten Hackles for the Balliol Scholarship, men would find that John had made up his lee-way, and would show the better of the two for his Degree. Therefore Norman, Rickworth, and all their friends, took it really to heart that Hackles should have been doomed, by sheer necessity, to carry so much dead weight all through the long vacation — four precious months, which, as every Oxford man remembers, so often witness the final struggle for College honours.

For these reasons, the nearer the day drew to Hackles’ examination, the greater was the excitement in College. Some sanguine non-reading men protested that “pluck would win” — “the pace was in him, and John must go;” but the Scholars knew a quantum of book-work must be done, and that no degree of talent or of

fire could make up for certain text-books unread, and certain technicalities which formed the conventional test of exact knowledge and hard study. The reading men, therefore, had their misgivings, which they vented in impatient remarks, by no means complimentary to the pupil on whom so much of John's valuable time, at the very crisis of his fate, had been mercilessly thrown away.

All this time, therefore, Walford's fame was at zero. He was so much "live-lumber," having come to the College to do no good himself, and eventually to hinder a man "who," some one said, "was worth as many Walfords as would stand between Carfax and Magdalene Tower."

The saving clause, that Walford alone had supplied the funds and the opportunity of Hackles' continued studies, was hardly taken into account; though, true it was, that as Hackles' remittances had failed, but for the timely Rich-court engagement he could not have paid his way. Still, there would have been no want of money had his real position been known. The only thing that could be done was to "coach" him up to the last.

"It will take me seven hard days' work to look once more through the seven plays of Sophocles," said Hackles.

“ We will do it together, in two hours each play,” said Rickworth, who had all the exact reading of a “ Greek drama man.”

Accordingly, Rickworth led John over all the dangerous ground of each play, and tried him in all the little niceties of scholarship before breakfast, for seven days together.

Two other men subsidised John in the same way ; thus cheering him with their sympathy and hearty good-fellowship, while they lightened his work.

The longer these kind friends pursued their generous work, the more sanguine grew the temper of the College. The general report was, that they never could have supposed that Hackles could be so well armed at all points.

There are those who never will forget the day of this particular examination *vivā voce* in the schools at Oxford. It commenced late in the day : an hour and a half was devoted to John’s Divinity and Sciences—three-fourths of the time about the latter. Now, Sciences was not John’s *forte*. Though he was not supposed to be really deficient in science, yet every other subject was believed to be decidedly more to his mind. In those days a certain select party of private tutors contrived to throw a mystery over Aristotle, and to secure a monopoly in private tutoring, on the

supposition that no candidate was safe unless initiated by one of the clique into the “crotchets” of the school—crotchets not to be found by any plain understanding in any books: so the idea that Hackles of King’s “was entered for the University stakes, without having trained with Scott’s lot,” or some other highly-privileged class, was thought as daring a disregard of all the chances as when the home-trained Wild Darrell, with the Littlecot groom as a jockey, was entered for the Derby.

And now the Sciences are done—the Aristotle examination is over, leaving all the strong points for the morrow—and Mr. Walesby, who had been an anxiously sympathetic listener, declared that there had not been a better Science examination in the schools. Great, therefore, was the triumph of those few sceptical individuals who had ventured to maintain that “the school crotchets” were soluble by common sense; and loudest of all was Norman, who declared that after Hackles’ examination this private trade was ruined, and “the force of *humbug* could no further go.” Great also was the hope—indeed, most triumphant and overwhelming was the confidence—with which all parties looked forward to the result of John’s examination in his favourite subjects on the morrow.

It was deemed a compliment that Mr. Thompson—so completely does mind rule all things at Oxford—walked back to College with Hackles, most cordially assuring him of his belief that his first-class was beyond a doubt.

Walford followed in the crowd; he had quite emulation enough now most sensibly to feel more and more that there were honours in life, and certain proud moments, which lay far beyond the power of gold to buy. Here was a man winning his way in spite of the distractions of narrow means, and purchasing by one-half his time the power to avail himself of the rest; while he himself, with all the talent of the University ready to do his bidding, had barely crept through the ordeal without credit to himself or satisfaction to his friends.

Next day the schools were early crowded with John's friends, and others interested in "the honour of King's."

The examination, though prolonged for above two hours, passed off in every point as well as could be desired; but towards the end there was a little consultation and whispering among the Examiners, one of whom was about to hand John one more passage, while the Senior Examiner cried, "Enough." This gave Hackles time to look a little hap-

pily round to the left, to exchange a cheerful glance with his friends. It was fortunate for John's equanimity that he did not look before; for that hasty glance was not so hasty as to allow him to overlook a certain bonnet, however quickly withdrawn by the door! and in a moment he was overpowered by the truth that his fond sister had found a friend to bring her over that morning from her home near Abingdon, to be a witness of this critical examination, on which all her brother's hopes depended.

John was a strong-nerved man, with much self-command; still, the utmost he could do was to take the book with lips convulsively pressed in silence, and take time to choke down emotion no discredit to the bravest heart. It was plain to the Examiners that some sudden feeling had come over him; and the Senior Examiner once more interfered and briefly said, in the name of all the Examiners, that, on every point, they owed him their best thanks for the satisfaction his very excellent examination had given them.

We need not describe the well-known sounds and trampling over benches which announce to Examiners that the happy candidate is in a moment surrounded with "troops of friends;" still less need we intrude upon those solemn confidences and words of affection which were ex-

changed when John had escaped to the further corner of the quadrangle, where the same neat bonnet, and the aged Rector of Grimley, were waiting to receive him.—Life has happy moments, and these are of them. This, indeed, was a scene hard to forget, even after a lapse of many years ; and sure we are, that more than one of our friends will be reminded of soft feelings which that day stole over them, when they read this touching incident.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW LADIES CANNOT ALWAYS AGREE.

FOR three or four days the life of Mrs. Belmont, the sole staff and support of the two distracted sisters, hung upon a thread. When once she was dead, Hannah, by the very violence of her own proceedings, had made assurance doubly sure that even “the eagling” of the old lady’s remains, and the rifling of her stores, would afford, to certain persons, less hearty satisfaction than the power of turning “those abominable Hengens” clear out of the house.

Already Mr. Whitley, the solicitor, had paid Hannah a visit. That gentleman had received a strange version of the state of his client’s household from the excited Mrs. Bayfield ; but he was entirely disarmed when Hannah fairly offered him, in the presence of the Doctor, every inform-

ation about the state of Mrs. Belmont. Dr. Finner assured him the brain was merely clouded by the consequences of indigestion, and that the effect might be expected to cease with the cause.

Still, the lawyer's visit only made Hannah more vividly to realise how suddenly the ground would sink beneath her feet, and she and her dear sister be turned out of doors, as soon as the old lady's breath had left her shrunk and shattered body.

Apart from any interested motives, Hannah was really attached to her only friend and benefactress. Besides this, she could hardly have a more trying duty than that of feeding the flickering lamp of life, and keeping watch lest the Angel of Death should, in any moment of incaution, steal upon that life, with which her own was so indissolubly joined. For these reasons, in addition to those wounds fresh rankling in both of the sisters' breasts, it was indeed a cruel addition for Hannah to have "to stand upon her right," with many an eager visitor, positively snappish and disappointed when Hannah told them, in her own calm but defiant way, that Mrs. Belmont was not dead yet; and she trusted the same answer might serve for several years to come.

Hannah well knew, that when consciousness returned the very name of Mrs. Bayfield would sound ominous indeed. It was, therefore, not less her duty than her humour to keep that lady away. Still, it is only fair to Mrs. Bayfield to say, she never wished her aunt dead: only, she was a lady of one idea at a time, and the thoughts of the money and her own clamorous family made so clear a sweep of her little mind, that the poor old lady was carried away in the full flood and torrent of those sanguine expectations.

Suffice it, therefore, to say, that between the companion and the family the gauntlet was thrown down, and not the least quarter could be asked nor mercy expected, even although Mrs. Belmont died without even any temporary arrangement for the maintenance of the sisters.

This critical position was soon realised by Alice, as well as by her more thoughtful sister, and naturally it tended, by diversifying, to alleviate the heart-shock she had received. But, happily, Mrs. Belmont soon began to mend.

"Good news!—good news!" cried Hannah, as, pale from her sleepless watching, she appeared by the side of Alice's restless bed one morning—the fourth day from her arrival.

"Good news? Oh, tell me, pray. What is it? How?—What is it?—When did it come?"

Hannah interposed an involuntary sigh for her sister's state of feeling, when she said,—

"Mrs. Belmont is relieved: she speaks quite sensibly, and inquires about—" she had almost said, "about you," and, therefore, by implication, the *wedding*; but corrected herself, and said, "Indeed, she is quite herself again."

No doubt, prudentially, this was good news for both of them; but what young lady in the cruel position of Alice Hengen could ever greet anything as good news which left the same yearning void yet aching at the heart? Indeed, Alice almost dreaded that recovery, which would be at once the beginning of painful inquiries and explanations, all tending to make her own lacerated feelings bleed afresh.

However, long before Mrs. Belmont was down in the drawing-room, Hannah had disclosed the sad state of her sister's feelings and her sister's prospects, and nothing more was necessary to ensure, on the part of Mrs. Belmont, the most delicate reserve in all that could remind Alice of her sorrow. But on such occasions there is a silence more expressive than words—there is a snatching of opportunities for little attentions, as also a peculiar tenderness

of manner, which plainly tells the unfortunate that each word and thought is tempered to the sensibilities of one thus "shorn to the quick." Such plaintive tones at length drew forth their natural response, and Hannah, after one morning's household cares, returning into the room, was surprised with finding the old lady all tears of sympathy, and as deep into the love-story as any young girl of sixteen!

That "there is always something in the misfortunes of our dearest friends for which we are not altogether sorry," or, at least, that we have no need to regret, is true enough.

"This little interesting adventure," said Mr. Finner, "is quite a new existence to the old lady. It will actually keep her alive. It's the most healthful stimulus; far beyond anything in the power of art."

Oh, how eagerly did Mrs. Belmont enter into the morning consultations which followed every post that did or did not bring letters! Oh, how indignant she was at poor Alice's tender appeals being answered by a callous round-text lawyer's letter, evidently written by a clerk, and signed by "those horrid creatures, with no more sense of feeling than their own parchment." She hoped and trusted "her lawyer was not such a hard-hearted being as to

lend himself to such shocking young men -- or she would never have another Will made by them, even if she died without one."

But when we speak of any consultation—as far as the old lady was concerned, this was nothing more than most excited and most indignant talk. Alice, like all who love, might hope against hope, and cling to that fond ideal, which is too often but the creation of our own fairy imagination and our own ecstatic feeling : but Hannah's hallucinations had long since suffered the cold collapse of disappointed love soured into misanthropy. It was but too easy for her to believe all that is evil of man, and to disbelieve all that is good.

Mrs. Belmont was too old to be sanguine. The young go by speculation ; their own hearts and spirits being the barometer of their future hopes : but age goes by precedent. Long experience has struck an average ; and no reasoning is so ingenious as to persuade them of that future, which is otherwise than the reflection of the past. Neither Mrs. Belmont nor the sisters could suppose that the lawyer could have been instructed by any one but by Walford himself. Alice's intuitions told her such cruelty could never be : yet, seemingly, reason as she would, so, indeed, it was. But as to Mrs. Belmont,

to say nothing of this heartless proof of the gay deceiver, it was quite enough that there was the least check or hindrance in the matter.

"I have seen it many times," said Mrs. Belmont. "When a gentleman is once backward in coming forward, it is all over with a silly girl—for that chance, at least. For, believe me, child, what endures delay is never love."

However, if Mrs. Belmont had missed one game of play, or some few days' amusement, in the wedding, she could not but feel that she had gained a far more lasting resource and entertainment in the company of Alice. She liked every one better than her own relations. Everybody seemed quite genuine and disinterested, in comparison; and very naturally so. For, it is anything but a pleasant sensation, with a succession of morning visitors and dutiful nephews and nieces, to feel that, while chatting about the present, their minds are giving you the go-by into the future; and that, in their sanguine speculations, you are already drawn and quartered by the whole set of them. It was, certainly, her nature to be kind and generous to all: but the very grace of generosity was gone the moment she felt her property was anticipated, and she was dealing with a race of expectants. Whereas every present to Alice or

her sister had all the charm of springing spontaneously from the heart. Who does not know the pleasure of such free-will offerings — from the first suggestion of a happy moment, the first physical ebullition of a healthful glow and something warm within — all through the little invention that plans the fairy present to surprise ; and then the purchase, the giving, and the delight reflected from gladdened eyes, as most veritably “ the gift returns into our own bosom !”

Hannah told Mrs. Belmont the decided part she had taken as regarded her niece. Mrs. Belmont cordially thanked her, saying,— “ Why, my dear child, she would have driven me out of my senses as soon as I came into them — that she would !”

She soon continued, after a pause,—“ Yes ; I see quite into the depths of that proposal of Caroline (Bayfield) : I had a broad hint once before about her joining housekeeping ; and now she was seizing on the first opportunity of coming in as a sort of keeper : but—but—I have more wit than she thinks I have.”

For these reasons all the family hated both the Hengens, and would neither say nor believe any good of them. They were “ a bad lot,” a “ regular plant.” The morbid Bayfield imagination

painted them all black—no light, no relief, no bright spot in them. In course of time the Oxford story reached London ; a very garbled version, of course. From that moment the Bayfield indignation was extreme. The very marked character of Hannah—a woman born by her very eye and concentration of nervous energy to look down into subjection a whole troop of maniacs—added to the alleged “profligacy” of her sister, looked, as with any other family it would have looked, like a decided conspiracy of the most glaring and unblushing kind. But no one could be found to “bell the cat”—no one dared to breathe a word of suspicion to the old lady. Every one wanted every one else to “lend a paw ;” but as the Will was known to be continually under some little alteration, every one was too wise to run the risk of his or her name being scratched out. Loudly as they talked about morality, this was too high a price to pay ; especially because, virtuously as they spoke of propriety, it was only for the money that they cared a straw.

The result of all this was that, for causes quite as much the fault of the family as of the companion, Hannah Hengen and her sister ruled supreme in Eaton Square. To Hannah,

ever since her illness, Mrs. Belmont declared she owed her life ; and as to Alice, she was invaluable as a second companion to herself, as well as indispensable to reconcile Hannah to the monotony and seclusion of her daily duties.

Still, however liberally provided with dresses and dainties, and all the comforts and elegancies of life, as much as if they had been Mrs. Belmont's own daughters, it was impossible they could enjoy freedom from anxiety or any unruffled peace of mind. As to Alice, she seemed, for hours together, quite dead to the world without. Hannah would find her sitting in her own room, cold as marble to her sister's fond and endearing touch, that awoke her from her reverie ; and Hannah acutely felt, that all the luxury of Mrs. Belmont's house did little else than deprive Alice of the only chance of being roused to throw off, by exertion, the deep melancholy that was wrapping her, as in a sable shroud ; while every day was bringing them both nearer and nearer to the end of all that motherly care which alone stood between them and hopeless destitution.

Well, indeed, might Hannah Hengen ask herself, "When Mrs. Belmont died, what—what could she hope to do ?" Hard enough is it for woman to earn a livelihood when looking to herself alone. But in proportion as a true

woman's heart prompts her to toil for her infant or a failing relative, she reads, "WANTED—*without encumbrance*," as the cruel—the tantalising repulse.

And, whenever her own difficulties—hampered as she felt she must ever be by a sister too spirit-broken to take another situation—crowded on Hannah's ill-foreboding mind, her thoughts, very naturally, would recur to Edward Walford as the cruel cause of all this misery.

Hannah had taken possession of the ever-memorable letter, the first received. It contained, as we said, a cheque for fifty pounds. That Hannah did not destroy the cheque as soon as looked at, in her fury, was in one sense fortunate. She never at that time dreamt that she would have allowed "his hateful money" to be accepted. Still, time passed on. Hannah's ill-governed and distempered mind more and more brooded over visions of dire revenge—plans which only a maddened nature could conceive for a moment. Still, on all these irritating occasions, no sooner had she conjured up one dark fury impotent to do her bidding, than she would yet venture on another. In some such mood as this the cheque happened to be turned over in her desk. She one day said to herself, "Poor, dear old lady! you have paid money

enough for Alice's expenses; these fifty pounds—would I could make the loss of fifty thousand fall on *him*!—shall be drawn, at all events." So saying, she sent it to the bank to be turned into ready cash.

CHAPTER XII.

FEMALE STRATAGEMS.

WE once heard a lady, of some experience in the ways of this world, speak as follows:—

“ Your young friend has made an excellent match indeed — position, family, fortune—in short, there is every element of a really prudential little affair. As to the gentleman, I must admit he is not at all the sort of man she ever wished to marry — but *not one woman in ten ever does find that!*”

“ Barring the husband, a first-rate match!” — “ Save and except all that makes married life worthy of the name!” — this does seem a wide exception, indeed!

We were struck with the truth of the observation, because, though “ obvious enough to the meanest understanding,” it was rather startling

as a female confession, in plain matter-of-course words.

When we had interposed some remark, the same plain-spoken lady went on to say,—

“Why, where is the use of denying it? We did not make the world, and we cannot mend it. No one ever asks the character of a really eligible young man—at least, if they do, they are always ready to parry every attack that is made upon his character. If he is reputed steady, they laud it to the skies: if he is wild, then they are no kind of believers in anything like virtue in gentlemen, and say he is the better for not being sly.”

We seriously doubt whether it ever was intended, in the economy of Providence, that enforced celibacy should be a penalty inflicted by the ladies.—“Offers” are too few to afford scope for selection: and when they come, they are almost always attended with that natural hallucination which, as in the old proverb of antiquity, is the first step in any ruinous proceeding.

Whatever may be the philosophy of the matter, the fact, no doubt, is this—in that critical choice, in which much depends on character, character is regarded least.

As to this view of parental care in providing

for a daughter, the case of Lady Harwood, of "the Rocks"—a picturesque estate in the neighbourhood of Richcourt—so far, was not peculiar. Lady Harwood was a fine, handsome woman, of about forty-two, with one daughter. She truly exemplified Dr. Johnson's saying of the inconvenience of early marriages—"the daughter begins to bloom before the mother can consent to fade." And there is, indeed, an urgent inducement to marry a daughter, when the mother thereby rids herself of what a second husband might deem an incumbrance, and also of one whose youthful attractions are a little too strong for her own.

Lady Harwood was determined on marrying her daughter as soon as she could, simply because she was yet more determined to lose no time in marrying herself.

Being also of a very communicative and a very censorious turn, no one lady in the place had indulged more freely in comments on the follies and improprieties of Edward Walford, whose sayings and doings had long formed a conventional topic to freshen up flagging conversation.

This indulgence Lady Harwood now found rather awkward: for, now that the Heir of Richcourt had finished his education, and it

was presumed that he would marry and settle, it was observed that Lady Harwood had grown much more tolerant and charitable in her judgments.—That allowance must be made for the vagaries of young men — that they were all wild alike,—the usual notion about wild oats, that when sown they are done with, and never spring up, though a certain “Cat-and-Dog Court” is supported by the crop — all these kindly sentiments drew forth from certain lady-friends one of those conclusions which show the superiority of ladies’ logic. We allude to those short cuts to truth by which, leaving out many a step in the process, ladies jump intuitively to the fact.

“The plain English of all this is,” said a jealous mother, “that Lady Harwood is determined to secure Ned Walford for her Lucy.”

Lady Harwood was a fine woman, and knew she was—yes, she literally enjoyed the consciousness of how, in a party, her end of the room, as she saucily said, “was always well warmed and aired—the other end was deserted, damp, and dreary.” Endowed with beauty, she would make the most of it. She used to argue, that, however worldly some might call her, should the pheasant put off its golden plumes, or the bird of paradise renounce its halcyon train, and look as dowdy and as

shabby as barn-door fowls?—Indeed, you could not look at the finely-flowing outlines of Lady Harwood's commanding figure, with health and enjoyment glowing in her features—you could not see her in the same room with the pinched-up Miss Snarling or the high-dried Miss Slowly—without suspecting that they were evidently intended to serve a very different end in the economy of the animal kingdom.

Of course, Lady Harwood was no favourite with her own sex. How can any lady be so, who will cruelly draw all eyes and ears unto her every word and look, and who exhausts the very atmosphere of a party of all those charming little attentions, which every curl and every flounce is studied to secure?—As the natural result of female unpopularity, because she was easy and hearty, she was called free and flirting, and treated with that occasional arching of the eyebrows, and other scandal in dumbshow, which insinuates that where the gentlemen are the prize of the game it is rather too bad not to play fair.

But the wings of female scandal are sorely clipped where the gentlemen are all determined not to listen to anything, but to laugh where they ought to frown, and to be as blind as blind can be. Lady Harwood had all the gentlemen

on her side. She was one of those women of whom, as the ladies say, "all the men rave about, but we can see nothing so particular about her." As to beauty, she had been admired as a girl; but there is a distinct kind of beauty in English ladies, which belongs to middle life. The pretty buds of twenty expand into roses of a nobler growth, in spite of a little autumnal tint.

Such were the winning graces and the attractions of Lady Harwood. To such a woman, life is nothing without love; yet, some two-and-forty years had passed, and she had known no nearer counterfeit of love than some parchment deeds in a tin box, and a crabbed, invalided old baronet, who, together with all the mercenary relatives who had connived at the profanation of so fair a creature, deserved to be attainted of high treason against the sovereignty of nature.

Time, at last, severed the cruel knot. Sir Henry Harwood, it was one day announced, had been duly binned up on the top of his fathers in the old ivy-covered vault, "leaving just room enough for two more to follow." The widow's weeds, for twelve long months, had contrasted but shabbily with laughter-loving eyes and glowing cheeks, and already had been changed for colours all the brighter for the dowdiness she

had endured ; and Lady Harwood had resolved, after one match of convenience, to reward herself with another after her own fond heart.

The lands of Rookwood adjoined the lands of Richcourt. To get Lucy off her hands by a union between the houses of Harwood and Richcourt, was a step too clearly conducive to Lady Harwood's little schemes of aggrandisement for so able a diplomatist to overlook it. Accordingly, she set about practising her own winning ways on Ned Walford as fast as she could.

No sooner had she commenced in good earnest than Walford hardly knew what had come over him : he had never felt so flattered or so sympathetically treated before. Lady Harwood was always considered one of those fine women whom it was an honour to please ; no one but a sharp, lively, and rattling kind of man — a man like Dick Cheston, wide-aware to the things of this world — had a chance with her. And nothing makes a youth like Walford so well pleased with himself as any little success with the ladies.

“ What is Lady Harwood about with that boy ? Ridiculous ! She never can want to victimise him so cruelly as all that ! ”

Such were the remarks of those models of primness and propriety named before.

But soon it appeared that all her ladyship's fascinations ended with leaving Walford very near her daughter Lucy, after some ingenious parenthesis about her sweet temper and amiable disposition; and, above all, about the attentions she had received the last London season at the Duchess of A.'s, the Countess of B.'s, or the Marchioness of C.'s most select little parties.

Here she shrewdly hit Ned's peculiar weakness. Some enemy had told him that with every fine estate, to be truly enjoyable and an honour to a man, the timber should be ancestral, and the very avenues patrician—in short, that in his case there was something more wanting—a roll genealogical as well as a rent-roll—before the Heir of Richcourt could take firm root with the landed interest in the county of Berks. The Berkshire people were rather clannish, and about forty acres, which had “been in the family,” always claimed to talk quite as large as if it could head a whole drove of free and independent voters to the county poll.

But Lady Harwood overacted her part. An experienced widow is very apt to forget that young people, in the season of their “sentiment,” must go through certain stages in love's fever, taking the infection in the natural way, and requiring to be wooed as a prelude to being won.

Lucy, also, was very different from her mother, being of a quiet and retiring, and at the same time, of a very sterling and high-minded character. Indeed, to imitate her mother, to follow in her steps, or to keep up with her eccentricities, was as impossible for the daughter as for a zephyr to keep pace with a tornado: so Lucy Harwood had early given up the attempt. She had grown up isolated and alone: the mother being a “caution,” when, in a milder form, she might have been a copy for the daughter.

In the case of Lucy Harwood’s early years it happened — as it often has — that the mother, being married too young to have had her surfeit of balls, beaux, dances and delicate attentions before marriage, was tempted to trust the nursing and the training to other hands. And Lucy’s education chanced to be all the better for the exchange. Her governess was a sensible and conscientious woman — with perfect transparency of character: which children read more profitably by far than any good books you can set before them. So the child and the mother grew up the very poles asunder.

Such being the character of Lucy Harwood, her affections were not quite so certain to obey the word of command: indeed, were rather fluttered than fired by the bold tactics of her

mother. Walford was very soon bantered on his softness in “letting that artful old woman billet her daughter upon him ;” as all her contrivances operated rather as a very antidote to love : though the retiring manner of the young lady appeared all the more charming by the contrast. Ned ended by saying to himself, “Poor girl ! it is not her fault : she is worth a dozen of her mother ;” though, just at the time that such sentiments might have ripened into love, the season at Melton was commencing, and there chanced to come a very marplot on to the stage.

Dick Cheston had not done with Ned Walford just yet. No list is more rapidly thinned by time than the list of those “capital fellows” who furnish stables and cellars for men who are always on the circuit to enliven dull country-houses, and let others find the wine and they the wit. No—no ; “Young Walford is too good a recruit to be lost just yet,” thought Dick Cheston ; and well he knew, that though Horace does say,—

“The huntsmen rise, though cold the morning,
And give their lovely spouses warning,”

yet too often, as regards sporting and good-fellowship, “married and marred are convertible

terms." So Dick thought it high time to take Walford away, to be duly initiated into all the mysteries of sporting society. Here, indeed, was a diversion, as Lady Harwood was aware, the most fatal to her machinations that "that meddling old sinner could possibly have devised."

Cheston argued that Walford "had nothing to do but amuse himself"—and very hard work, too. As well say,—Nothing to do but to sleep without being weary, to eat without waiting for an appetite, or to enjoy the exciting diversions, irrespective of the powers of exhausted nature to thrill or to respond. Still, Walford was of that age at which the full flood of life and spirits certainly does buoy us up to an extent that, thirty years later, we look back at with surprise, and exclaim, "How we ever could stand the racket of all that hurry-skurry and excitement is wonderful indeed!"

At Melton, Walford did really promise himself that he should hold a respectable place. He had a first-rate seat upon a horse, with all the nerve that nature gives to youth, before one heavy shock sets the tell-tale heart feebly pulsing a reminder that not many such as these go to one final stop. He had also some very good horses—undeniably good—that is, very good in the abstract; as Dick Cheston knowingly

expressed it, they were better suited to a slow, heavy country, but had not the pace for the wide Leicester meadows and the breed of Quorn hounds.

Cheston also, at one glance at the condition of the stud, saw that he and Walford would "be nowhere" after the first five minutes, and therefore he arranged for the use of some well-seasoned screws, to give Walford's horses time to get gradually into their work. He also secured the services of two of the best grooms known at Melton, famed for always falling in with the second horse at the right part of the run.

So far, Cheston was a useful friend. Some would say, he served his friend because he served himself. But Cheston had unfeigned pleasure in seeing Walford enjoy himself; he had also no little pride in showing the Meltonians that he would ensure for a novice a far better place in the field than his own unassisted dealings in horseflesh would ever have promised him.

But Walford soon found Leicestershire hunting both a great deal better, and a great deal worse, than he ever had imagined. Mere nerve and seat upon a horse proved to be only one part of hunting, and the more boldly he rode, the further he was behind.

Walford at the same time began to feel, that

of all the mendacious sketches by pencil or after-dinner talk he had ever heard, none were further from the truth than those that related to the yawning ditches, and the stiffest of fences and stone walls, to be charged as a matter of course, in every run with fox-hounds. Most riders, to his surprise, regularly refused many a fence decidedly within the scope of a fast young lady; while the knack of opening gates, knowledge of the country, a running cunning, and a great tact in saving his horse, gave Cheston, now too old to risk a fall, a far better place by the end of the run than all Ned's dash could secure. "Mark my words," said Dick, "the best sportsmen leap the least; and as to taking your notions of hunting from the coloured sketches in the sporting-print shops, these are the pictures of what hunting is not."

But hunting is only one part of Melton life. Every day cannot be a hunting-day; and even if no long frost empties the club at Melton into the clubs in town till the weather breaks, still there are many long days and nights when whist and billiards, betting on the longest straws to be pulled out of a rick, or any other folly, form the chief part of Melton life.

Here, Cheston honestly did all he could to keep Walford out of mischief. He had no

objection to win of Walford an occasional five-pound note, just for pocket-money : but, whether from indifference or from conscience, he cared not to lay him under more serious contributions.

Unhappily, Le Croix was there with others of his clique ; and as Walford's yearning for excitement was already pretty strong, it required little inducement to draw him on to games of Van John and Unlimited Loo. Without detracting from the honour of the nobility as a class, we fear that every order has its scape-graces—men who are always shrewd enough to see when any young fellow like Walford can be made to pay for the honour of their acquaintance.

The mention of Le Croix and his friends reminds us that certain bills of mutual accommodation, bearing three names, of which Walford's was one, had been renewed again and again ; and that at last it “was not quite convenient at that particular time” for the other two stylish gentlemen to provide their contingent in cash. Walford, therefore, after a complimentary allusion to his splendid rent-roll, soon understood that he had no choice but to provide the money for the whole.

If Walford flattered himself that, by such accommodation to these “honourable gentle-

men," he had penetrated further into the interior of their homes or of their hearts, and had cemented friendship thereby, he reasoned very much as other young men do reason. But wise was Polonius when he said, "Loan oft loseth both itself and friend." Wise also was good Dr. Primrose, Vicar of Wakefield, when, to some of his too-attentive family connexions, he would lend an umbrella or great coat of small value as they were going away—the borrowers of which rarely came again. Le Croix and party were now positively stiff and distant—almost patronising, if not depreciating, in their manner. So determined were they not to acknowledge any obligation, that, as Walford once observed, "you would suppose, from their manner, that they were the obliging party." In a word, all Ned's generosity resulted in his being treated with an affectation of endurance and toleration, and finding himself at the tail of the Aristocracy, instead of at the head of the Gentry, of the land!

It was at Melton that Walford began to find that there is a certain principle of exchange, a compensation in all society. The man "who has nothing in him but his money," can receive no more than money has the power to buy—to wit, the covert flat-

tery of knaves and the blind worship of fools. He could not but look with envy on the almost penniless Dick Cheston, who, with wit and humour at all times, and something to say on all subjects, had always a cluster of men around him : so, also, had Captain V——, famed for his sketches of men and manners ; while as to certain public men, who by the hard work of a session had well earned their Melton recreation, including some very young men, already embarked in this world's graver duties—all these men stood as on vantage ground, indeed.

From Melton, Walford naturally went for the season to London. He did, indeed, spend the Christmas at home, once more to encounter the machinations of Lady Harwood, as also to be yet more sensibly impressed with the retiring graces of the daughter.

Lady Harwood was out of all patience with her daughter for doing, or rather for being, the very thing most likely to win upon a man of Walford's feelings, and of Walford's way of thinking, too. Like other widows, Lady Harwood was rather for taking by storm than by the dilatory formalities of a regular siege ; for, to her, long suits were absurd as Chancery : she would have none but summary proceedings in the Courts of Love. This may sometimes answer

well. The first five glances often fix the dart ; and everything after is as indirect and round-about as the ways of Commodore Trunnion, when he tacked starboard and larboard all the way to church. But, such tactics would not do in the present instance. Walford had long had enough to reveal to him that he was “the great catch” of every season ; and that he had only to ask and have : which mental impression is almost a certain antidote to love. The very idea of “courting” implies, something to conciliate ; “wooing” implies something to be won : a “love-chase” is truly a chase ; and the sport and excitement are all over when the silly animal doubles back into the dog’s mouth.

Lucy was not at once prepossessed with Walford. She was still in the plenary possession of that freshness, that sanctity of feeling, which look forth upon Life as a time to love in. It is a later stage that cools down to the prudential point of view—thinks of character instead of charms, and admits of the notion of the suitable or the eligible. No: young love never calculates, still less compounds. Its visions are all gorgeous. It shapes from its own yearnings a beautiful ideal, and dreams of the happy day when something real shall correspond.

It is a later stage still that “puts down” love

as a luxury, or a piece of wanton extravagance ; treats the heart as a false and visionary suggestor of girlish or of boyish sentiments ; and ends by marrying, not a man but a maintenance ; fully contented with the comfort and dignity of a matrimonial degree.

It was no small vexation to Lady Harwood : but Lucy had not come to regard fascinations as froth, and to believe, with her mother, that, after the first sparkling and bubbling of ecstatic feeling, the bowl of life matrimonial was all flat alike.

Lucy Harwood, however, did make some kind of impression on Edward Walford : but many a bird goes off rather ruffled than hurt. It is very hard upon the ladies that the gentlemen are ever on the move ; whereas, Cupid must have a sitting, and not a flying, shot. How often has it happened that, but for the thaw that cleared Belgravia for the hunting-field, or, but for the rain that put off the second archery meeting, two persons, who from that day would never have parted, have been doomed never to meet !

It was not till Walford was on his way to London that he became conscious of an indescribable something, which clearly resulted in this — that out of the hundreds of ladies he had

seen, he carried with him, without intending it, a more vivid mental photograph of Lucy Harwood than of any other.

However, a cigar acted as a sedative ; and long before Walford reached London, his mind had been no little diverted by the contents of a sporting newspaper, of a very entertaining character, discussed with a casual acquaintance whom he met in the train. This was no other than Johnny Winstaff, a turfsmen who had got up in the world, and from the lowest dregs of society had been allowed—at least for some hours on a betting-day—to associate with the highest in the land. Johnny was a genius in his way—reading men instead of books, and in full possession of certain faculties, which studious men too often lose for want of exercise ; for, Johnny could pick up knowledge with his eyes and ears, reading men's thoughts in their faces ; and, with the instinct of the untutored Indian, could find a clue to many a difficulty where logic would be at fault.

Such characters seem perfect wonders to a youth like Walford, especially when they contrive, as well as Johnny did, to throw the magnifying haze of mystery around the little that they chance to know. Johnny Winstaff's history was briefly this :—He began life in the

gutter—and afterwards became groom-porter to a gambling-house. One day, a rash fellow, having lost his money and his temper, offered to bet a hundred pounds upon a throw.

“Done, sir!” cried Johnny. “I’ll lay it myself!”

“Whereupon,” he said, “I was long time getting out my purse (because I never had one); but, meantime the event had come off, and I had won. It was good long odds, I calculate, for he could but have kicked me if I had lost. At the time I had no stockings to my feet, and coat buttoned up to hide no shirt.—Still, as I hid my feet under the table, the gentleman played me till I had won four hundred pounds—with this I started a suit of ready-made clothes, and began betting at Newmarket, with a good run of luck.”

Walford had long been hankering after the distinction of a “good judge” upon the turf, and as Winstaff was now a noted bet-agent, a few months found Walford a regular attendant at Tattersall’s, with a book—such as it was—for every race.

Of course, Walford’s money flew apace, and landed him in difficulties, which lead us to the strange *dénouement* of this eventful history.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WOES OF WOMAN.

OUR friends will be impatient to hear a little more of the position, or the prospects, of the two unhappy sisters.

Yes. We left them unhappy enough: the heart of the one was enduring that cruel revulsion which ensues, when the warm stream of woman's love is thrown back upon its gushing fountain: the heart of the other was rankling with impotent revenge.

In woman's breast, wholly absorbed as it is with the feeling that predominates, vengeance knows no repose. It is not only an evil, but a restless spirit.—Summer upon summer may fuse creation in one glow of gladness, but it may not warm that cold and curdling heart: winter upon winter may bind the crystal

streams in icy fetters, but it may not numb or paralyse that wicked will.

Up to this time, little need was there that Hannah Hengen should, as Burns says, be “nursing her wrath to keep it warm.” She had a daily, almost an hourly irritation in the pitiful condition of her afflicted sister.

It is all very true that money is not happiness; but, no doubt, poverty adds a sting of its own to many a form of mortal misery. It is a perilous position for poor woman, when her livelihood depends upon her power to exert herself; and that power at the mercy, not only of the sickness that pales the cheek, but even of the love that flutters at the heart. “To trifle with woman’s feelings,” has a mere sentimental sound for those who sigh on silk and satin; but the broken-hearted seamstress may, with her peace of mind, be robbed of the very crust by which alone she lives.

Hannah saw that such was the helpless condition of her sister Alice. Their kind old friend was daily inquiring for some situation, such as Alice could fulfil, and at the same time checking herself with the reflection that a little more of Mr. Pinner’s quinine, and—if she could but manage the journey—just one month at Ramsgate, would be indispensably necessary to prepare those shattered nerves for any serious employment.

"Poor dear, benevolent old lady!" said Hannah. "One more journey only will she take in this life. I see the change that is gradually creeping over her. I know by her feeble pulse, that weaker and weaker is the mainspring of life, and no one can tell how soon the only heart that will ever throb for Alice may stop—and stop for ever. And then——"

It seems as if the world were in open conspiracy against charity in woman-kind.—Me-thinks I see a pale and anxious mother, clasping a child to her breast in that motherly way that makes it seem one with herself, going to ask for her customary employment.

"Yes,—but the child—and *you* don't look strong—the child will be sadly in the way."

(Sorrowfully) "But I *couldn't* bear to be separated from the child, Ma'am."

How hopeless, then, was the future of Hannah Hengen—the last plank gone—exultingly snatched from beneath her feet, and finding herself weighted with an invalided sister, to battle with the hundreds who will face the most repulsive labour that throws a roof between themselves and the "pitiless pelting" of the storms of heaven.

If Hannah in her heart cursed the guilty cause of all her sister's misery, and her own em-

barrassment, we must regard her as much “in sorrow as in anger,”—and deeply pity if we severely condemn.

It was the peculiarity of Hannah’s provocation that it was ever present,—its sting was ever rankling: scarcely for a single hour was she permitted to forget her trouble.

Old age has always some jarring, painful theme on which to harp. And with Mrs. Belmont this was, “What shall I do for Alice? —there is no employment! When I am gone, poor dear creature, what ever will become of her? Oh! that wicked—wicked, young man!”

If Hannah left the room to spare her feelings, perhaps she would encounter Alice herself upon the stairs, pale, wan, and heart-broken.—“Looking mazed,” as Susan termed it, in her homely phrase!—a phrase as every day began to show, alas! of fearful significance. The delicate fibres of her racked and tortured brain were mazed, too surely, beyond the art of man to clear the tangle, or to set them free.

Even night, to Hannah’s excited feelings, brought no repose. Amidst her poor sister’s restless tossings on the bed, Hannah nightly fell asleep—slept fitfully, and only woke to a sense that Alice was wakeful still; or if, perchance, she did find her wearied into a kind of slumber,

sighs and starts, and almost moans, betrayed to Hannah the agonising truth, that beneath that heaving bosom there was an abiding sorrow, awaiting returning consciousness once more to claim her as its own. Many a night it would have been a relief to Hannah to have found her sister sleeping the sleep that never ends.

Up to this time, Hannah had never set eyes on Edward Walford ; yet she knew all his movements—when at home, when at Melton, or when next expected for the season in town. And she never ceased to hope something from him—of what kind it were hard to say. The persons who assisted her in tracing Walford from place to place, were always puzzled to think how she could hope to turn her information to the least account.

CHAPTER XIV.

WALFORD MEETS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

FOUR years had passed away since Walford had left College, and one day he met Hackles, and, as usual with Oxford men, the conversation turned on the fate and fortunes of their respective contemporaries.

We are very well aware, that in the tales of Virtue Rewarded in the story-books, every good boy who learns his book grows up fat and prosperous, and is raised to the honour of sitting between two sticks in the Churchwardens' pew. But every idle boy grows up ragged and wretched, and sinks from bad to worse; and after quarrelling with his own bread and butter when he is young, tries in vain to be allowed a slice of somebody else's when he is old. Still, we can testify, that of those who started fairly

neck-and-neck with us in the same race of life — making the University both their training-ground and their starting-post—it is wonderful in how many cases the idle and the industrious have found their rewards quite after the manner of Tom and Harry in the Spelling-book.

Hackles, who was always a fast talker, and forgot that, according to all rules of fair play, one equal half-part of conversation should consist in listening, first ran on with the history of steady, striving, hard-reading men like himself :— “ After Ray came out in the first class, he remained at Oxford a year and a-half, private tutoring—he had great luck, because he always was so popular : he took seven men to Dolgelly one Long Vacation, and so made a purse to start with, for he was not worth a shilling, and then read for the Bar, where he is already practising. He is a very ‘hard’ fellow ; he can read all day, and report for the papers all night, so he is sure to do well. Isn’t he lucky ? ”

Walford said he supposed he was, since Hackles thought so, and there was no accounting for tastes.

“ And Williamson ? ”

“ Oh ! silly, deluded mortal ! He became a fellow of Oriel ; caught the distemper and went

to Rome. So, all his preferment was at an end. He now lives a hard life in London, and has found out that his scruples were all a delusion. He belonged to a party, and one conscience served for all. This common conscience happened, very awkwardly, to point to Rome : so to Rome Williamson needs must go.. Of course there was a little excitement at the time—‘one pervert more, in spite of his splendid talents,’ was honoured with a corner in every newspaper. But now the novelty has worn off—that game is all up now: men care as little about Rome as Rumford—and Williamson has now awakened to a sense of a grievous loss in things temporal, without the slightest gain in things eternal.”

Walford thought he had heard enough of the reading men and their fortunes ; so, he turned the conversation to a class of men far less likely to die of hard work, or to follow a Quixotic conscience to ruinous conclusions.

“ Waller,” continued Hackles, “ became insolvent, his liabilities by some fifteen hundred pounds, and his assets ‘one silver pencil-case, value about three and sixpence.’ He was last heard of at Melbourne, having invested his whole capital in two horses and a dray, and seeking a dividend in carting luggage.”

" And Rickworth?"

" Rickworth's story is the most strange, and, in some respects, the most satisfactory of all. There was a rumour that he had gone mad—quite out of his senses. But his senses, as they used to be, were a kind of acquaintance, of which he might have taken leave with no little advantage. But Rickworth's history is a remarkable one. There always was a fire and enthusiasm about Rickworth—an energy that only wanted a right direction—something to make him pause and think—something to arrest him in his headlong course.

" This check and admonition Rickworth found in the manner following:—A friend who had accompanied him many a night in riot and excess—well known at every haunt of idle men—one day was discovered by Rickworth, lying half on his bed and half off, with a prussic-acid bottle on the floor and a tavern bill on the table, on the back of which was written, 'I am so wretched that I cannot live.'

" ' As soon as I could collect my scared and horrified senses,' said Rickworth, as he told me the tale, with all the graphic power of former days, intensified by the depth of his excited feelings, ' I looked round the room, taking in at one glance the low sporting pictures, the

box of cigars, whips, billiard-cue, and greasy novels—the corpse smelt strong of tobacco-smoke, and a short pipe was emerging from the pocket: it seemed to me as if the finger of God had pointed the way to this silent lesson, and left me alone with the dead in the stillness of night, till my whole soul was pierced with the yet small voice from within that cried, ‘The wages of sin is death! ’ ”

“ But what made him too wretched to live? Had he spent all—down to his last farthing? ”

“ Money! —money! Walford. What! have you not yet found out that the diseases of the heart, though often caused, are never cured, by the money in the pocket? Know, then, that in the well-trained mind of Rickworth, sin and sorrow, like thunder and lightning, come like one peal and flash together.

“ ‘ Truly—too truly’—these were his words—‘ embodied in the scene before me, I read as I never read before, that awful truth—‘ The wages of sin is death! ’ If, as Shakspeare says, ‘ Cowards die many times before their death,’ then so do sinners: they die by inches. Each noble feeling paralysed—love brutalised into lust, or soured into hatred—conscience silenced, though the worm that dieth not will rear its viperous head; add to this, each nerve un-

strung, the sinking of the heart, the throbbing of the brain—each pulse of pleasure made a vehicle of pain; and then, what though the course of natural disease is slow though sure, still God waits not always the sinner's time, but the fatal consummation comes in a form like this!'—I stood and looked at him, but I could not speak. I had much to say; but there was none to answer. I was alone—shut up in my own thoughts and reflections: the result was—one hearty prayer—one, yes, one; and that the first, I had almost said, I ever prayed. I never could pour out my soul in words till then. In that solemn moment I made one firm resolve—for which resolve I live, and in following out which I hope to die.' ”

“ Then,” said Walford, “ what I have heard is really true—that among the street-preachers of London there is one, an Oxford man—a Scholar of his College, Prizeman, and a [man of much talent as a writer? ”

“ Yes; true, indeed! The first I heard of him was from Wilton of Baliol, who, just before the Epsom Races, met him in Bloomsbury Square, and said, ‘ Of course, Rickworth, you have a good book for the Derby?’ ‘ No, my good fellow,’ was the reply; ‘ I have changed all that.’ And then the truth came out.

“ More than once I have seen our old friend Rickworth bare-headed on a chair—once in the Broadway, Westminster, and once in St. Giles’s. Only last Thursday I saw him in the midst of ragged women without bonnets, gibing boys, and a few heavy, sottish-looking men—a costermonger, half curious, had been arrested by the clear voice and hearty energy of the preacher; a butcher, too, in blue frock, the tray of meat upon his shoulder; with workmen in their shirt-sleeves—for it was dinner-time—listening as they cut their bread and cheese. It was pleasing to see how, one by one, he riveted, fixed them all—heart spoke to heart—the truth of nature thrilled through every note of his deep, melodious voice. You remember when Rickworth delivered his prize poem, how all were struck with his vocal powers?”

“ And was there anything very apt in what he said?”

“ Most apt, indeed. He had hit the secret of all effect. ‘He spake in parables.’ Familiar illustrations from things most interesting to the very men who heard, and at the very time he spoke. The ship on fire, blazing at the stern; three hundred souls clustering about the rigging, over the bow, with the life-boat in the distance—this was one text or framework of his

discourse. In St. Giles's he had Wallis's murder, tracing the course of evil passion till it overpowered the man, and brought him to a miserable end ; but above all, he uttered woe to those who lead others into sin—lay snares for poor women, and go to their long account with sins of others as well as their own upon their heads."

" Rickworth was a sad, wild fellow. There was a connexion he formed with the glover's daughter—good enough before, men said ; for he had always a most winning and beguiling way, especially with women—which alliance, I think I heard, caused that glover's ruin. Cast off by her friends, she was last heard of in saloons, and what her end was I cannot say."

" He traced her out, to draw her from her evil haunts ; found her in a garret ; a slow fever consuming her by inches ; he removed her to another lodging—tried all he could to save her life : but several weeks of quick consumption brought her to the grave. Meanwhile, Rickworth read and prayed for hours at her bed-side ; but happily she died. 'I must have married her, had she lived,' said he ; 'repentance without reparation is hollow indeed.' Poor Rickworth ! it was mercifully ordered that his sin-

cerity should not be submitted to so severe a strain."

"Think of a man of Rickworth's tastes and feelings, and this creature of the saloons!"

"Yes, but Rickworth felt it was he who brought her to the saloons. Sad position to realise for a man who, with healthful moral feeling, thus returns to his own proper self!"

Not many weeks after this conversation with John Hackles, Walford was passing through Piccadilly, when he met Rickworth with his Bible in his hand, just returning from preaching amidst the Potteries at Kensington. He looked very hot and exhausted — haggard and worn ; indeed, his constitution had already begun to give way. "The very man I wanted!" exclaimed Rickworth. "I was about to post a letter to you at Richcourt. I want you on a matter of grave importance."

Walford felt rather staggered by the earnestness of this address.—There is a manner in the highest order of earnest and enthusiastic minds that precludes all denial, and hurries us away in the very torrent of their own resistless energy. However, as the two were going along, Walford began to think Rickworth could mean nothing

more than that he wanted a subscription for some of what Walford would call his new dodges, or queer vagaries ; so, to indulge him that once for old acquaintance sake, were no great hardship. The day was hot, and Walford proposed some refreshment ; but his friend, too full of his mission for hunger or for thirst, just turned aside hurriedly for some soda water, and then hailing a cab to set them down near Covent Garden, he hastened along by Drury Lane, into Wych Street. " You must bear with me, for once," he said earnestly, " and let me take one or two poor souls on my way." So saying, he turned up a court, and making his way up two pair of rickety stairs to a small room at the back, made some inquiry after a middle-aged man, whose looks betrayed that he had come near the end of his course, and that a very reckless one. " That man was in the Guards once," said Rickworth ; — " drink and gambling brought him to this."

" Will no friends help him ? "

" He has worn them all out, and exhausted all. For years he led a life of pleasure ! centered all in self ; not caring for others then—now, no one cares for him. ' The wages of sin,' —the law of sin—' is death.' Counteract it

who can.—The maddened brain, the whole heart sick, and body racked with disease, is this world's evidence of things to be hereafter.”

Changing the scene to another room, Rickworth pointed out a pale woman of thirty, in a fetid garret, with wet rags, on a line from wall to wall. In a corner stood a red pitcher, and one solitary cabbage, that looked like a kind of stopper, on the top of it.

“That woman has apparently seen better days. Who is it ?”

“A pastry-cook's daughter. She followed some villain from Reading to London. It was her own love and confiding affection that betrayed her—‘seething the kid in the mother's milk.’ ”

“And where is he ?”

“Oh !” said Rickworth, ironically, “he belonged to a highly proper and virtuous family, who deemed, as usual, no curses too loud for the wicked creature that misled their son :—the victim was left to starve, with one alternative—a life of sin. But come away—in the next yard is the case for which I most want you.”

Accordingly, rounding the corner, where old stores, fried fish and periwinkles, and cheap ballads, all indicate the habits of the population, they entered a narrow court with a black gutter,

a mimic Styx, running through the midst of it—two sooty-coloured canaries in a cage, and some sickly-looking geraniums in the window of the lowest room on the right of one common staircase, bespoke the superior temporal prosperity of one occupant at least: this was Mrs. Powell, the landlady of several sets of rooms.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Rickworth,—very kind of you to come visiting poor souls. There is quarrels, certainly, but not what there used to be, down in our court, before you came among us."

So said Mrs. Powell—a middle-aged Welsh-woman—as she stood with her arms a-kimbo in her dark brown dress that once was black, her ample proportions, without the help of crinoline, filling up the doorway.

This Mrs. Powell was a woman of great force of character. She had also what they call "a good heart"—a very valuable commodity at all times; only, when it is prominently specified, "very good about the heart" commonly implies "very rough about the tongue."

Still, Mrs. Powell took full credit for being good-hearted—"leastwise as far as she could afford to be"—and not distraining for arrears of rent, but, where sickness was in question, taking a promise instead of pence.

However, Rickworth discovered quite heart enough in Mrs. Powell to serve his purpose; and while he ensured her the payment of a weekly stipend, she was not slow to throw in various little neighbourly acts into the bargain. Indeed, a little talk with a man of Rickworth's gentleness of manner Mrs. Powell enjoyed, like the visit of a creature from another sphere.

All the court by this time had learnt to look out "for the gentleman" with feelings of the same kind.—It was a bright day in June: all windows were open: everybody could call to everybody else across the narrow passage. The people there were chiefly women. The husbands were about their work—all but one old man, leaning, with his crutches as supporters, against the wall: so, almost immediately, what with heads appearing out of the window, or with women—some in stays and bare necks—presenting themselves in the yard below, and many half-naked children—the whole population of Bell Court might be said to have turned out ready to form an audience.

"There now, this is no business of yours—none of you," screamed out Mrs. Powell, as if to give general notice that this particular visit was an honour paid specially to herself—"the gentle-

man hasn't come to preach the Word—so be off, all of you."

At the same time she led her two visitors, as the only chance of privacy, into her own little piggery ; for, in odour at least, it was little better—and shut the door.

"The boy you want?—Yes, Sir.—Here, I say! why don't you come this way, you dirty young rascal, and not be making a mess a-damning up that gutter?"—Whereupon, half shy and cowed, a child of six years of age came skulking up, begrimed with dirt and clad in some bigger boy's trowsers cut short. "I have let him have his victuals, as you said, Sir; since they buried his mother last Tuesday-week : and I mind that you did say that his father was a gentleman, and you were going to write to him ; but—maybe this is ——"

Rickworth, she saw, looked uncomfortable ; and as to Walford—the truth flashed upon him in a moment ; he stood conscience-struck and aghast.

"It's a thousand pities, Sir, that that child should take to the streets—they are all thieves, even the youngest, and pickpockets and shop-lifters as they get older. Picking and stealing is all their work, and all their play; they live

on what they can find in the streets, like an animal on a common—and the five shillings a-week, even if this child is to go on having it regular, will not keep him away from growing up a thief and a ruffian."

This, and much more to the same effect, came forth in answer to a series of ingenious hints rather than direct questions : for Rickworth thought it better to touch the chord of association, and to let Walford into the whole state of the case from the spontaneous volubility of Mrs. Powell.

"They call him Raph?" said Rickworth.

"Yes, but Raph Walford are his two names, I have heard his poor mother say, many's the time."

Walford could not help feeling that some one had taken a great liberty with his name.

"You see the likeness, Walford, I presume?" said Rickworth.

"As like that gentleman as ever he can stare — nose, eyes, and mouth!" put in Mrs. Powell, rather awkwardly : "So I hope he's going to do something handsome for him; and though I say it myself, there's nobody could undertake the child as well as myself. I'd put the stick about him sharp enough if I caught him out in any bad ways." 

"The likeness to the mother, of course, was

what I meant," said Rickworth, looking fixedly at Walford; "those dark hazel eyes and long eye-lashes there is no possibility of mistaking."

Walford looked half guilty and half disgusted. He always did look disgusted whenever there was a difficulty which he could not escape by the painless operation of drawing a cheque of small amount.

Rickworth had too keen a recollection of the days of his own thoughtlessness to be too severe on Walford. And now he thought the scene had been long enough before his eyes. The impression must be strong enough for once, at all events. So, he concluded by saying something in under-tone to Mrs. Powell, while from every door and window there peered forth a keenly scrutinising eye to see if any money passed. At last, taking Walford's arm, he led him quietly out of the court.

The Sunday after this conversation took place, as Rickworth was crossing Kensington Gardens on his way to Lisson Grove, he met John Hackles; and, having about an hour to rest before he tasked his energies with his Paddington open-air congregation, he made John sit down with him beneath those richly-spreading elms, to enjoy a little friendly conversation. Every Oxonian can understand, from sweet experience, how

delightful between old College friends conversation is ever found to be. Their hearts and minds are tuned and set together like those of no other men.

“ Well, Rickworth,” said Hackles, after a little casual conversation, “ how did you succeed with Walford ? ”

“ Really, I can hardly tell you. He seemed impressed at first, and if it had been a case in which I could have made him act while the heart was hot within him, all would have been well ; but, ‘ out of sight out of mind,’ is a true proverb with men of his dull nature, sunk in the lethargy of Self.”

“ How did you proceed ? ”

“ I led him to the alley. I showed him his own child—his own flesh and blood—though young in years, already old in sin—a precocity which appeared in those sharpened features and marked lineaments, which usually require some years of experience in all the wickedness of this sinful world. I also gave such a turn to the conversation, that one of the neighbours should allude to the mother’s recent death and the child’s forlorn condition.

“ This hint seemed strong enough for any direct appeal ; so, walking further, I pointed to some tattered creature with a bottle, stealing out

of a gin-palace. ‘Evidently,’ I said, ‘she has seen better days ; observe her step, her carriage, the guilty consciousness with which, flushed as she is, she steals away.’ And then I talked of the last hours of Maria Wingfield, and all her agony of remorse, when, free from maddening liquor, she ‘communed with herself upon her bed,’ and was compelled at last to think ! The reflection forced on him was irresistible,—that just such a fallen outcast as he saw before him once lay in his bosom ; through him was scared and hunted from the company of all decent people, and doomed to live where sin, like malaria, slowly but surely poisons all that dwell within its sphere.”

“And when you sat down to lunch with him, what did he say ?”

“His mind ran on a sacrifice of money, not of self. When I suggested that he should take the child home within a few miles of Richcourt, and entrust it to some respectable farmer to bring up, this proposal made him look serious. He said he had already done ‘what was usual.’ Of course I felt all the sympathy of a fellow sinner, when I told him how I once thought the same. But much more was *usual* than he, or as I, ever dreamt of once. A daily increase in the City Arabs was very ‘usual.’ Another and another victim to drunkenness and disease was

‘usual.’ Alas! too ‘usual’ also.—And thus I quietly led him to understand that his money never could compound for, nor render undone, one deed of sin committed. If he ever hoped to rise above the level of that foul slough, black with ‘the frailty of youth,’ or whatever specious terms were made to varnish sin that made woman the victim, and doomed the innocent babe to a life of profligacy—I urged that the first sacrifice required was *self*; adding, I hoped there would be a time with him, as there had with me, in which each several black drop that had been added to this ocean of misery would give a death’s chill to the heart; and then, how dreadful would be the contemplation that he had called into being a living soul, and had lost the present opportunity of preventing the curse of sin passing from generation to generation!—this child proving the father of another as neglected as himself, to bring into existence more little outcasts still, in a fearful series of endless progression!

“In this state of things I left him. The child is under the care of an old Welshwoman, to do the best she can with him for the present.

“But there is an idea suggested by this sad case, on which my mind has been ruminating much of late. Do not, I pray, think, by anything

I am about to say, that I would extenuate my own long list of sins committed ; but do you remember what Falstaff said, ‘treason was in his way, and he found it?’ ”

“A good idea ; there is much embodied, or rather lurking under it. Even so you would say—”

“I would say, both of Walford and myself, Sin was in our way—a sin of a certain sort; and we found it. See, here is a wicked deed ; really awful in its effects—a life of profligacy, a lingering death of poverty and disgrace, for some fond, confiding woman—her offspring cast upon the cruel mercies of the wide, wide world. These are among its incidents and effects—lust, lies, and treachery being also the means to that fatal end. Yet we all find this sin so varnished over under specious names—all that is fair in the foreground, the black and foul out of sight—with every plea of custom and necessity, that no man intends half the enormity that he perpetrates.”

“Then, where lies the fault ? What remedy would you recommend ? ”

“The fault is partly in the Church : I mean, the ministry—the preaching of the present day. The Word and the World—the Word of God and the ways of man stand out in bold and defiant contrast in holy writ ; but not so in the

pulpits of these our times. Where now is the teacher who, like the prophet of old, will strip off the flimsy disguise of fashion or of custom, and call the worst of deeds by the worst of names, and say, 'I will set before thee the thing that thou hast done?'"

"But are you so visionary as to think that you can preach down, or write down, that vice which especially 'flesh is heir to?'"

"My idea of the preacher is, 'Whether they will hear or whether they will forbear' at the time, that he should still uphold the standard of the law divine.—For, how often has that been practical in one generation that was deemed chimerical in another?"

"True: you may instance slavery."

"Yes; slavery is a case in point. The hatred and abhorrence of that traffic in human flesh preceded the abolition of it; and how did that abhorrence gain upon the popular mind? By painting that murderous system in the blackest colours, and branding it with the most repulsive names. And may we not also paint the white slave, as the black, from the innocence of her early home; expose the fiendish arts by which she is enslaved; and that life of ignominy which ends but in the grave? Believe me, all such warnings will prevail in time; weaning first the

more thoughtless, and then the less thoughtless class, from doings at which, in all their consequences, many a man has heart enough to revolt.

"To this end, the preacher and the writer may both conduce. The writings of men like the poet Cowper, awakening pity and indignation for the poor African, co-operated with the eloquence of Wilberforce to wipe out the foul stain of Slavery from Christian England."

"But is not this a delicate subject for the preacher to approach?"

"Though difficult, it is not impracticable. But I was speaking of the timidity and the short-comings of the pulpit generally. What is our great Example of human conduct—the highest? What is the standard of holiness He taught, even in a state of society far behind our own? Not only the rigid outlines of Truth and Justice, but all the softer shades of sympathy and lovingkindness.

"He traced out the monster and attacked him in his lair. He raised his voice against hypocrisy in the Pharisee and extortion in the Publican.—Imagine one of our Bishops preaching like St. Paul, 'of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come,' as chosen topics stingingly applied on some state occasion to — another Felix!

“ Do you suppose that it would produce no effect, especially on younger men not yet committed, if the preacher, in enforcing truth and honesty, exposed the falsehood and the cowardly treachery; the days and months of heartless smiles, of promises implied, but never for one moment intended to be kept; and above all, of that perverse morality among ‘men of honour,’ that holds helpless woman to be ‘fair game,’ the slave beyond the pale of common honesty or common feeling?

“ Do you think that the correct family man and his virtuous wife would open their doors quite as readily as at present to those well known to be living in a state which the preacher constantly exposed in all its blackness?”

Hackles. “ It is, then, to public opinion that you look for amending this widely-spreading sin of the present day?”

Rickworth. “ Public opinion is omnipotent: for, what does it involve?—that sympathy without which the human heart can hardly beat—the hearty salutation, the happy response:—in short, that—the loss of which Macbeth felt was living death—‘honour, love, obedience, troops of friends;’ and last, not least, woman’s smiles.

“ But, not to dwell on one kind of sin, we will turn to others, and see how the modern

preacher does his part. Look at the extravagance of society, the waste and the gluttony of a modern entertainment—to a degree which almost all reprobate, but none can stop. Consider the system of debts, too often synonymous with dishonesty—frauds in trade—the greed and covetousness periodically finding vent in reckless speculation and national gambling;—where, again, is the preacher?"

Huckles. "The truth, I plainly see, is this—that the pulpit follows where it ought to lead. It treats all topics but those of vital importance. It touches on the mere outworks of orthodoxy, but rarely strikes home to the citadel of the heart."

Rickworth. "My dear Hackles, the Church, rebelling against the traditions of Rome, has fallen into a set of traditions of its own. If our Saviour came on earth He would not know His own Gospel. He would find plenty of the 'mint and cummin,' but little of 'the weightier matters of the law.' The Liturgy does teach the Gospel—faith and works, God's part and man's, and personal holiness and improvement of character—in its fair proportions: but the preachers do not. Thus the written law of the Church is one thing, but the practice is another. Of course no man likes to be 'pricked in his heart,'—no man likes to feel the irresistible

conclusion, ‘Thou art the man !’ No man very willingly cometh to the light — conscious of deeds of darkness, that that light shall make glaring as the day. And modern persecution finds its account in calling names.—‘A teacher of mere morality’—‘Deistical’—‘Heathenism,’ but chiefly ‘Moral teaching,’ has become the unpopular term for every man who preaches as our great Master Himself has taught us. Nay, as to ‘the Sermon on the Mount,’ it has been questioned* whether it is the Gospel at all : and ‘the sort of preacher whose text is a parable,’ is quite a phrase of ‘Evangelical’ contempt !”

Hackles. “I have often reasoned to the same effect. More clergymen than one have virtually admitted, that the cry of ‘Mere morality’ has been but too successful ; and that to apply the rule of the Gospel faithfully to the practice of the day is now so rare, that it would be quite unpopular.”

Rickworth. “It has always seemed to me a strange inconsistency to dwell so much on not trusting to our own good works. If good works abounded—if the fault lay on that side—if there were so many good works now-a-days to trust to—the case were different. It is no exaggeration

* See Rev. Fred. Robinson’s Sermon in reply. Third Series. Sermon 12.

to say that the doctrine, ‘Not saved by works,’ has been rung in the ears of men till at last active charity and honest dealing have been accounted rather a heresy than the marks of a Christian man.”

Huckles. “ You are only naming one proof more of the degree in which men hate the truth, and silence the preacher.—To live and behave yourself like an upright, honest man, must only be faintly mentioned. The last thing a man is taught is personal religion.* No; God must do all.—To watch the risings of an envious or an angry spirit, to form a habit of resisting evil thoughts, to watch every indication of an evil heart, to show forth the sympathies of our Saviour, which were broad as creation—all this holds but little prominence—you may hear it in a parenthesis; but it is not the Religion of the day.”

Rickworth. “ And what is the result?”

Huckles. “ The result? The result is, that Christianity is sublimated into cant, and volatilised into a mere dreamy sensation—evidenced more in a cast of the countenance than in a habit of the heart. Religion, banished from the heart, takes refuge in the lips—a thing of Sundays, with little

* This opinion is confirmed by the Rev. Dr. Goulburn’s work, lately published, on *Personal Religion*.

restraint upon man's week-day callings. Do you doubt it? This shall be the test,—Only walk into the City—consult those keenly-scrutinising and sagacious men, whose security for their thousands rests on the honesty of those they employ, or those with whom they deal. Is the word of the Roman Catholic worth one penny less in the market than the Protestant's? Is either worth one penny more than the Unitarian's, or even than the Jew's? Nay—there shall come in a reputed Deist, Sceptic, or Free-thinker, and not a man upon 'Change will value one farthing the reputed Christian's word above his.

“ Stay ! but I forgot : there is one—just one —calculation based upon creeds known among the children of this world, namely, this,—the extreme Low Church, or so-called Evangelicals, as also the Dissenters, in point of confidence in their sincerity and good faith, are daily more and more, in popular opinion, classed by themselves. Ask the old tradesman with many credits in his ledger which he had rather trust—the Low Church or the High, and No Church at all ? I have proposed the question, and have been answered, that the mere heedless man of this world, whose piety is never thought of, stands higher in point of credit and good faith than

the ordinary members of any extreme Evangelical or any Dissenting Congregation."

Hackles. "And what is the cause?—what do you infer? What does this prove on the present question?"

Rickworth. "It proves this—that whereas Practical Christianity is so far shelved and scoffed at as 'mere morality,' that no denomination of modern Christians commands more credit or confidence by virtue of their profession, it is actually a fact, that one large section of the Church—proverbial for carrying this shelving process furthest—commands less credit and confidence: in other words, judged by the test of truth, and, yet more, charity, are no better than men of no religion at all."

Hackles. "But you do not class all 'Evangelicals' as the same?"

Rickworth. "By no means—neither do I class all Dissenters as the same. Many men are wiser than their parties. Some so-called Evangelicals are like the good old Simeon of Cambridge; and some Dissenters preach duties as well as doctrines, like Angel James or the late William Jay of Bath.

"Yes; and you will find that common opinion—no bad test of a widely-prevailing fact—is more and more suspicious of the extreme

Evangelicals too. As to Christian charity, is it not beyond all question, that to belong to an Evangelical party is the wreck and ruin of all charity—that is, kindly sympathy—and of all liberal feeling? In one word, if it be a rule of judgment, that ‘if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His,’ it follows incontrovertibly, that the more ‘Evangelical’ the further from Christ.”

Huckles. “And, to return to the point from which we started, you maintain that the Church of England, however pure in principle, is at the present day timid and compromising in practice?”

Rickworth. “Exactly so. The pulpit does not uphold the standard of God’s Word; ‘the salt has lost its savour;’ the World is too strong for the Word; the truths of free grace, of justification by faith, and ‘not by the works of the law,’ preached unguardedly and exclusively, are administered as an opiate to the conscience—no doubt well suited to fill those speculative chapels in which (observe) those *comfortable* doctrines most prevail. But among all parties in the Church the very last topics of the preacher are the besetting sins of the day—our ‘Prophets are dumb dogs;’ witness, first and foremost, the little sense that prevails of the enormity of be-

traying fond and confiding women, and then throwing them and their offspring to swell the black stream of our festering city population !

"But, to touch on another subject, how is it that you came to alter your plans of life?"

Huckles. "You have heard that I am, happily, partner with my uncle as a Conveyancer at Reading?"

Rickworth. "Yes, but you were intended for the Ministry. So, also, was Wills of Exeter, Whalley of Baliol, and half-a-dozen more—all alike reading men and steady men—as also clever, inquiring, and, what is most of all wanted, earnest and original men."

Huckles. "True. You have mentioned the very class. I do not say that I am worthy to be numbered with them—from whom may be expected to arise other Luthers, Loyolas, or Wesleys—men to trouble to a state of healing the stagnant and insipid waters of which you just complained."

Rickworth. "I think so, too. The Bishops have openly asserted that the candidates for Holy Orders, instead of rising with the standard of the times, are actually inferior to what they were; and fewer in number, too, than when the men I have named were rarer far."

Hackles. “And you would know why that class of mind finds little satisfaction in the Church?—The reason is this: To ‘assent and consent to everything in the Liturgy and the Articles,’ we feel is the condition, not only of Holy Orders, but also the condition on which alone—however much study and experience may affect our views—we can at any future time take a new charge, or honestly retain an old.”

Rickworth (ironically). “But do not the formulæ admit some safe *non-natural* meaning—conventional meaning—the meaning of the framer—the meaning of the imposer?”

Hackles. “No doubt, a man already in the net may find many a wide mesh to let him through; but that is small encouragement to any free man to rush blindly in. All these subscriptions plainly say, ‘Who enters here must give up *thought*.’ Only look at the Clergy—see the character this forms—the peculiar half-mindedness: for the clerical mind is dwarfed and stunted; and no wonder, since the Clergy are forbidden to make an honest use of those faculties which God has given them in His own peculiar service! They live for ‘orthodoxy,’ instead of truth. Our subscription operates as a kind of sieve that keeps the grain out, and lets the chaff go through.”

Rickworth. “Then the tendency of things is this,—to range much of the intellect of the land, and no little of the honesty, against the Church! — But suppose another kind of test, how would it operate?”

Huckles. “Get rid of what is manifestly wrong: we will talk afterwards of what is right. When men give up believing (as every petition for relief from subscription proves of all who sign it), it is high time they should give up declaring. To operate much worse than our present system were hard, indeed. The mind being tied and bound to opinions theological first, soon proves but too apt to be tied and bound to the conventional substitute for the Gospel afterwards. We secure a set of men who only do not think differently because they do not think at all, and flatter ourselves we are the better for such unanimity! — Believe me, it is not by a system and selection such as this, that the black stream and foul current of this world’s ways will be effectually stemmed.”

After awhile Hackles continued: “I wonder how long it will be before the world will be ashamed of that one most impudent, most domineering word, Orthodoxy! It is a word that virtually says to the human mind, ‘So far shalt thou go, and no further’—‘We allow perfect

liberty of private judgment, only no sum intellectual shall result in any but the old answer in the book.— You may view a subject at any angle, only it must always look the same.— One man may have the eye of an eagle ; another be like a mole : still, they must both preach that the same thing appears the same, however narrow the vision, or however great its refraction.'

" Every man knows that his University pours forth into the parishes Class men, Pass men, and Pluck men—men clear and dull—men crotchety and obstinate — men who think deeply and superficially—and men who don't think at all —and that, of these same men, some are learned, some are ignorant—some know all the facts of the case, some half, and some scarcely any— still, there awaits them all one Procrustean bed on which minds of all sorts and sizes must doze alike."*

* The Bishop of Oxford, June 24, 1860, writes thus to the Editor of the *Daily News*,—"I am speaking the sentiments of many of my brethren when I say, that our consciences are troubled by the stringency of the declarations that we have made. We wish to be honest men, and not be required to say that we *believe* things that we *disbelieve*."

CHAPTER XV.

HARD TIMES FOR MORE PERSONS THAN ONE.

ALL this time Snipe had lived chiefly in London. As London is the great centre of trade, so is it also pre-eminently the headquarters of the man who lives by his wits. All monied men, and all enterprising men, come to London: not only so, but all idle men, all men determined “to have a fling,” all youngsters thinking that London is the one great ocean of pleasure, and in breathless impatience to launch forth upon its mighty bosom. In short, while the brain-exhausting toil and nerve-fretting energy—while the hearts and souls of the men of mind, as well as the thews and sinews of the men of labour, are daily worn down, like the very stones, to smooth the high roads of life for those to come after—there is

always a floating surface—with bubbles, more or less bright, of knaves and fools—and with straws and trifles, which some deem “London life.” These, however, are about as insignificant on the balance as the grubs or the butterflies in the meadows amidst the nobler animals which draw the plough or fill the foaming pail.

Some time had passed since the last cheque, for what was entered as “Tuition,” had been paid, as usual, by the solicitor to Snipe. Walford had reflected,—“What will Snipe say, what will he think, or what will he do, when all this farcical kind of engagement has come to an end?” The solicitor had replied, that Mr. Snipe knew the day must come. He may find some new appointment. He will “take it quite like a man of the world.”

Never was any expression more appropriate. Snipe took everything like a man of the world. So, whereas Walford felt rather uncomfortable at the thoughts of meeting Snipe in town, Snipe had no such feelings as to Walford. Of course, they soon did meet in town: for, though London is a very large place within the bills of mortality, within the walks of the fashionable it is limited, indeed. And when they met, the frank and friendly way in which Snipe came up to him, and entered into subjects of

common interest, literally going on just where he last left off,—this took Walford quite by surprise. Tom's manner won upon him: and, as old associations asserted their former sway, Walford gradually warmed towards Snipe, till he almost blamed himself for breach of friendship, in having, for many months, seen nothing of him.

As soon as Snipe was consulted about certain Turf questions, he had an opportunity of doing Walford no slight piece of service.

“How do you stand, Walford, with Lord Clevedale's mare?”

“Very heavy upon her—her performances have been so good she is, surely, all but certain—eh?”

“No doubt, supposing that the mare is as good as the said performances; but —”

“What! have you any private information about her?”

“Simply to this effect, that Harry Rashley, who knows most about her training to the latest moment, is drawing off. Depend upon it, something is wrong!”

Hearing this, Walford, who was always liable to be turned by the last adviser, proceeded to hedge his bets, and thus saved a serious loss—and lucky it was for him he did so: the ba-

lance on the settling-day was heavy enough against him, after all.

“There are critical moments in life,” says Thucydides, “when even an enemy who helps you becomes your greatest friend; and the friend who crosses you becomes your greatest enemy.”

This was just one of those moments—and Snipe, from that moment, rose mightily in favour; and was, indeed, so firmly established, that Walford replied petulantly and impatiently to the next cold sneer and reflection on “that honourable gentleman, Thomas Snipe, Esq.,” “that, in spite of anything that might be said, no one should ever again persuade him that Tom was not a downright good fellow.”

Certainly, one might naturally observe, that all Snipe had done was a service that cost him nothing. But no man is very logical in his likes and dislikes—“the greatest rascal,” or “the best fellow going,” are commonly broad conclusions, that simply mean that a certain person has pleased or has thwarted us on some vital occasion.

Snipe always was a man to do you any service that cost him nothing; but Snipe was not, therefore, the less keen on other occasions to do himself a service at the cost of his friend.

We have mentioned Snipe's constitutional good-nature—a kind of social and communicative disposition, so fertile in friendly turns and kind offices; but besides this he had another characteristic, particularly calculated to make an easy-going fellow like Walford look up to him as a superior being. Snipe knew the secret of the *ignotum pro magnifico*—“leave a man in the dark, and he will give you credit for a great deal.” So, Snipe never boasted—not but he took pretty good care that his successes should all be duly credited to his own private account—still, the old verdict of “accidentally done on purpose” will suggest the way that his honours were brought to notice.

For instance, Snipe had a kind of sporting-country-house-enlivening-and-a-making-himself-generally-useful acquaintance with the Marquis of Glythorne. The Marquis gave Tom board and lodging, and the run of his stables and preserves all the day; and Tom duly paid the Marquis by amusing the drawing-room with charades half the night. Walford would have talked a great deal about an acquaintance of this kind, but Snipe never mentioned as much as the Marquis's name; but he did lead Walford more than once where the Marquis was most likely to meet them—which *ruse* took effect. The Marquis

did happen to come up to Tom in a friendly way, in Pall Mall, heartily thanked him for his last well-chosen packet of books—arriving as they did so opportunely, when they were all snowed up in the country: the consequence was, Walford jumped to a hasty conclusion, that Snipe was on intimate terms with half the aristocracy.

On this, and several similar occasions, Walford always remarked,—

“ Why, Snipe, you never told me you knew Lord So-and-so ! ”

And Snipe as regularly replied, “ Of what possible interest could it be whether I knew him or not ? ”

The truth is, that the great business of Tom’s life was to be seen in conversation with as many gentlemen, and yet more with as many ladies, of rank as possible ; and you could never ask the name of a lady who bowed to him in Rotten Row, but she was always the daughter or the sister of some duke or earl, or a lord at the least.

This produced a remarkable impression on the mind of Walford. Yes. Snipe’s success with the ladies was a thing quite beyond Walford’s power to comprehend.

Still, amidst all the externals of fashion and prosperity, Snipe’s affairs were really growing desperate. At one time he thought of asking

some assistance from Walford ; but the experience and observation of his life said “ No. There’s nothing for nothing in this world : you will be choked off with some trifles to get rid of you, and thenceforth every chance of—anything really in the way of business—is gone for ever.”

Snipe might have added, “ Anything in the way of pleasure, too.” For men like Snipe live in a very curious as well as a very critical position. As long as they can keep up appearances there are people to keep them ; but there is nothing between turtle-soup and starvation. It is easier at one time to be invited to all the luxuries of the season than, when once down in the world, to beg a loaf of bread !

This pitiful extremity Snipe had been so perilously near as to have seen in all its frightful depths, and feelingly to have realised more than once. “ No, no, I’ll venture anything but this,” he said to himself. “ I must hold up my head to the last—I will never jeopardise selling the reversion of so many feeds in expectancy for the trifles to be gained *in forma pauperis*.”

Tom had the sense to see there is no friendship in Fashion ; nor does there pretend to be. To give your heart to all the hundreds to whom you give your hand were hard indeed. The

fashionable world—the society of the season—perfectly well understand each other. It is a kind of Joint-Stock Company, of “limited liability.” Very limited, indeed, as regards the slightest intention of sharing or of sympathising in anything but the smiles of other persons.

Had anything been wanting to confirm Snipe in this worldly-wise opinion, it was not long before he found it in the manner following:—

Walford came to him one morning with a face in which “you might read strange matters,” and throwing down a letter from his solicitors upon the table, with intense disgust, said he had come to consult Snipe about “raising the wind,”—“He had more engagements than he could meet, and how to raise any money he did not know.”

“Why, you surely do not mean to say that you have mortgaged every acre of your estate?”

“No. But I have got to the end of all my ready money.”

“And why can’t your solicitors borrow for you?”

“Why, so they could: only, some applications must first be made, from the vexatious technicalities of the law, to my Trustee.”

“To old Tawstock? And you quarrelled

with him, I recollect ; so thence your difficulty. Is it not so?"

" Well, that is something like the beginning, middle, and end of the whole story."

There was a lurking suspicion in the mind of Snipe, that Walford's difficulty was only an imaginary one. Still, Walford was evidently at a dead lock : whether in fact, or only in feeling, the result was the same. The offended Trustee had once insultingly declared, that Walford would one day want his assistance, and might live to want it in vain. And the thoughts of exposing his own imprudence as a virtual acknowledgement of Sir Buller's foresight ;—the very idea of having to confess that he had run through a large amount of ready money so soon after he had the command of it,—this seemed to Walford a difficulty indeed.

However, after a little consultation of ways and means, Snipe pointed out that certain engagements would stand over a little longer, and that three or four months from that date would be soon enough to take the cold plunge which Walford so much dreaded ; and, meanwhile, no one could say what piece of luck might not turn up.

At the same time, Snipe could not help in-

wardly reflecting on the trifling annoyances that to some men appear troubles of the first magnitude. The Heir of Richcourt was as much disconcerted by the mere unpleasantness of raising money, as a penniless fellow like himself at having not an acre on which to raise any !

However, with Snipe, the difficulties then apprehended were of no imaginary kind. Something must be done, and that shortly. Men who live by their wits have an anxious time of it, however sharp those wits may be. Money is daily going out, and by nothing but honest labour can money be as regularly coming in. They run a match against time ; and time, in the long run, is sure to win. The silliest birds grow shy at last, and scarce too ; as few stand plucking more than once : so new ground continually must be broken, and the day will come when the last stratagem has been tried, and the tricksters of society end by sticking in the mire.

A rich match—poor woman the dupe—is the grand resource of such men. Snipe had one lady of splendid fortune in view, and resolved in good earnest to sink or swim by this audacious venture.

As to this venture, it were unlike Snipe, indeed, not to keep his own counsel : but in affairs of this kind, be as cautious as we will, facts

speak for us. The very smiles of a lady of fortune are all numbered ; and from the days of Penelope downwards suitors have been lynx-eyed, and jealous of any insinuating rival : so, Walford was not long without correct information ; neither was he very long without resolving to lose no opportunity of catching a glimpse of this heiress of large estate.

The rich Miss Lindsay and her splendid fortune was at this time the common talk of all the fashionable world. It is no use denying it, man is instinctively a money-loving animal. From our earliest nursery days, caverns of emeralds and precious stones, and Fairy-land for “ picking up gold and silver,” are tales that have found a response in the youthful heart. While in later years, the very name of a wealthy heiress, or a sudden shower of gold poured by some freak of fortune into the lap, quickens the pulse of every hearer, while with sparkling eyes they “ devour up your discourse.”

Miss Lindsay, some said, deserved a little luck. She had been hardly dealt with—left an orphan—crabbed aunt would not even let a kind uncle be civil to her—kept strict at the most awfully “finishing” of all the Brighton academies, the mistresses of which lived in bodily fear whenever the girls walked out, and lectured

them out of all the good the sea-breezes had done them as regularly as they came home—because the young ladies would look at the gentlemen, and the gentlemen at the young ladies of the Wanley House Academy.

Miss Lindsay's schooling was at first paid for, with never-ending supplies of tamarinds and guava jelly, by her own dear father and mother, of the Cavally Estate in the Island of Jamaica. But, one sad day a fearful tornado spread desolation over the land, levelled the paternal home with the ground, and buried two loving and devoted hearts amidst the ruins.

Miss Lindsay's bill and extras, paid regularly by Messrs. Wiry, the West India Agents in Cornhill, was the money calculated to pay the rent. So the two Miss Willetts of Wanley House Academy were not long in feeling the tornado too : for, “no funds in hand—extent of devastation—and the future quite uncertain,” formed the startling topics of the said agents' letters instead of the customary cheque.

They had just before broken the sad news to Miss Lindsay, and here was more sad news to break—news of a kind to *break* them.

The Miss Willetts had themselves known trouble ; and a fluctuating estate in young ladies —like the solitary plank between the pillow and

the billow—alone stood between them and the wide, wide world—that world in which, however wide, if you cannot pay for your standing, you are sure to find yourself one too many.

The two sisters talked it over with many a sigh. They both agreed that, after the way they had at various times been treated in the course of their school-keeping, there had been enough, and more than enough, to set them against the whole generation of girls. Still, there is nothing like a precarious subsistence to keep alive a fellow-feeling. Miss Lindsay was destitute; if their door closed upon her, no other door was at all likely to open. True, two or three West India residents at Brighton often asked her to dinner, and invited her to stay: but the last people ever asked to dinner are those who are in want of one; and it is more easy to get distressed gentlefolk into your house than it is to get them out again.

The name of this uncle was Jeremiah Lindsay—yelept “Jerry Lindsay,” a Sugar-refiner at Limehouse, Lord Mayor, Sheriff, Bank Director, and filling as many other civic offices as men do fill by the time they have outlived their rivals and their freshness: for full-grown children rarely have their toys till they are too old to care for them. And a very good fellow, too,

was Jerry ; only Miss Lindsay had been reared in the faith that he was as bad as her father's angry words, taken literally, would make him out to be. For, the two brothers had last met at their father's funeral — quarrelled over the Will, and never spoke again.

The result was, that after the Misses Willett had for some days left Miss Lindsay to find her level with the very dust, as she realised the idea of being utterly destitute, Miss Lindsay felt suddenly restored to riches, in comparison, by the present of a made-up suit of mourning and the *sine-pay* appointment of the identical junior-assistant, whom she had herself done her part to worry and to tease.

In this capacity Miss Lindsay is said to have served eighteen months ; by which time, as things had been growing worse and worse, the Misses Willett's finishing-masters could live on hope, in lieu of salaries, no longer ; and flaring hand-bills told of three pianos to be sold, besides single beds, globes, and all the usual characteristics of one of the not unfrequent sales in Salutary Square.

This brought Jerry Lindsay on to the stage. Jerry grievously regretted he had not been apprised of the state of things before. He had never hated his brother, though his brother had

once wronged him. He had felt a burst of fraternal feeling at his brother's death, and was now delighted to take to the orphan as his own.

Jerry propped up the fallen fortunes of the two Misses Willett—paid the school-bill, with interest—took a formal receipt for the same: not that it was any good, but for the force of habit—and found them some other employment: for he said he would not wish his worst enemies to keep a school.

From that day Miss Lindsay became the talk of Limehouse—the talk of Clapham, where Jerry lived—the talk of the 'Change—and the talk of all the City men, old as well as young, because every one looked right through Jerry to certain golden heaps beyond; and those golden heaps borrowed a more spirit-stirring interest as men speculated on the child—and that child an orphan—who might one day have it all.

Mr. Lindsay had, for several Parliaments, represented, nominally, the Borough of —, but, really, the West India interest; which also entitled Mrs. Lindsay to ventilate her fuss and finery, while she endured much real discomfort, qualified by equal quantities of imaginary grandeur, at Ministerial Balls. Creatures made by

Providence for the lower latitudes, are sure to gasp uncomfortably in higher regions, however much they may feel bound to enjoy themselves there.

The wife of a Prime Minister once said to her lord, "If you needs must buy votes by ball-tickets, I hope our misfortunes may visit us in a form a little more interesting than that old Mrs. Limehouse."

Miss Lindsay, tall, commanding, and elegant, seemed to be sent into the fashionable world as if in answer to such reasonable entreaties.

Jeremiah Lindsay, in a few years, passed away, leaving his niece in the possession of a princely fortune—sufficient to enable her to continue, by courtesy, in those circles to which, as a mere matter of business, her uncle had been able to introduce her.

Miss Lindsay was regarded at once as one of those ladies whose money could command everything, except that which, to the female mind, gives value to all the rest—rank and precedence, instead of *sufferance*—in high society. No one doubted that she would be happy to give some of this world's substance for this world's shadows, and not a few were bent on assisting her in the exchange.

As to chaperones, Miss Lindsay was far too interesting, in more senses than one, to be long in want of a lady in a position to take her under the shadow of her commanding wing.

All persons used to the ways of this world know that many a tacit bargain is made, without the name of money shocking ears polite. So, as Lady Colville, called "the Queen of Belgravia," used to sail into the room, with the rich Miss Lindsay on her arm, a quiet smile would ripple from one to another, implying that it was well understood that some one had committed flat simony in selling place and preferment in the temple of Fashion.

The fame of Miss Lindsay, and also that Tom Snipe's attentions to her were far more pleasing than those of men who affected to despise him as an adventurer, soon reached the ears of Walford.

Walford could believe anything of the fascinations and insinuating qualities of Snipe. What particular service Tom could render to old Lady Colville was a puzzle to him : still, certain it was that her Ladyship would stop her carriage in the Park, and that Tom appeared always to have some inquiry to make, or some errand to perform, very soon after he had seen Lady Colville.

Lady Colville was as great an impostor, and as full of sinister schemes in one rank of society, as Tom was in another ; and a wide-awake fellow like Tom, always visiting in the higher circles, was as good as eyes and ears to her Ladyship : quite like an “office of private inquiry.” Lady Colville could feel at ease before Tom—she could throw off the stiff mask of hypocrisy and false pretence, and enjoy credit for the sharpness of her wit without fearing any reflection on the bluntness of her conscience.

“ But could Tom make it at all worth Lady Colville’s while to slip into his hand so great a card as the Heiress of the Season ? ”—That was a question requiring mature consideration.

Walford was jealous of Tom, in more respects than one. He envied him his Belgravian invitations at all times ; for, the Heir of Richcourt was not “a name to conjure with” amidst the affluence of London. But, most of all, did he envy Tom the prospect before him at that particular time. Walford’s pecuniary difficulties—hampered as he was by his quarrel with his Trustee—were now a source of much annoyance : and the idea of the rich Miss Lindsay, whose fortune would set all to rights in an hour, falling to

the lot of Tom Snipe—this was provoking and tantalising in the extreme.

It was not long before Walford caught sight of Tom at the door of Childs' Bank, in most animated conversation with a tall, elegant-looking lady, in an open barouche; and just as the carriage drove off, Walford's suspicions were confirmed beyond all doubt by hearing Tom say, "Pray present my compliments to Lady Colville. Her request shall be attended to without loss of time."

"Miss Lindsay, the wealthy heiress of the season!" exclaimed Walford, as he clapped Tom on the shoulder. "Now, really, that is too bad of you not to introduce me to the lady, and not to give me a chance."

"Ah!" said Tom: "if you had only as good a balance at your banker's as no doubt there was on the credit side of that little book which the clerk returned her as you came up, you would snap your fingers at old Tawstock—eh, Walford?"

As the two walked away together, there was very naturally much more conversation of this kind—Walford dwelling inquisitively on Tom's good fortune, and Tom declaring it was "no good"—but "quite a mistake." At last Tom said, quite despondingly and impatiently, "How

could such a thing be with a poor devil like me? Mark my words, Walford: this is true all the world over—a young lady of fortune is anybody's property but her own: if she has the spirit to jump out of window and leave a whole host of Lady Colvilles to fight about the disposal of her and her property after she is gone, why, then, she may choose for herself no doubt—otherwise, what with edging their own scampish kith and kin into her way, and keeping every decent fellow out—with crossings and vexations, brow-beatings and advice, puffing up one man and running down another—the poor girl is kept in such a state of harassing and misery, that she slips into a man-trap in sheer desperation of escape."

"Really," said Walford, "you are a knowing fellow, Snipe—you are continually opening my eyes to the true state of this world. I had often wondered why it is that some girls act so strangely, when they have no one to ask but themselves."

"The plain reason is, that they feel they have some one else to ask. There are other spells, besides magic spells, in this world—habit, association, and a certain sombre, paralysing influence, which the old ones have over the will and ways of the young ones: these are

powers by which, in the hands of these horrid old beldams, many a young girl is spell-bound, fast enough."

After a pause Snipe continued :—

" Ah, Walford ! had I but your fortune, that would just turn the scale. Her Ladyship would look at it as an eventual consideration for herself. It would be something by which to justify a bit of matchmaking to the world : but as to helping me in my present condition, it is what her Ladyship can't do—daren't do—is afraid to do !"

" Afraid ! Afraid of what ?"

" Afraid for her character's sake."

" Character, indeed ! But she has not usually been so particular, by all accounts !"

" True : true enough. You are speaking of character of another kind. Certainly, Lady Colville has always been very sceptical as to the Ten Commandments—a wicked unbeliever in all high principle ; but, for all that, there does not live a more devout worshipper of certain Heathen Deities who preside over cunning, tact, and worldly policy."

" You think, then, that for Lady Colville to make over Miss Lindsay and her fortune without any plausible consideration would be —— "

" Would be ' worse than a crime : it would

be a blunder.' It would be a virtual abdication — where now it is her pride to reign supreme — of the realms of sharp practice and common sense."

After some indifferent remarks, and after time enough had passed for Walford to make his never very rapid reflections on this view of the case, he continued :—

" You and Lady Colville seem to understand each other pretty well, Snipe."

" Yes : I flatter myself that I can read her inmost soul, Walford. And what is more, I really believe her Ladyship is quite a friend of mine. Yes, the old girl really likes me. And we not only understand each other in our usual way, with quiet looks and with half-closed eyes, and with a general agreement as to the hypocrisy and humbug of those who only want the skill to play the same game : but, on this particular subject of Miss Lindsay, we have, unfortunately, come to rather too plain an understanding."

" And the upshot of the matter is——?"

" It is just what you would naturally suppose. ' You know me, Mr. Snipe,' said Lady Colville, ' so, no nonsense. A hundred pounds to half a farthing will make rather too ugly a settlement for these money-making times. So,

to play into your hands is a thing impossible. Why, what would the world say?"

"Much more followed—the end of which is, that her Ladyship is open to a bargain—she is not above a commission, and all that."

"What! And did she say so?"

"Say so! oh! no. These are things that don't look well in words—they are never said. You are confounding the top of Belgravia with the bottom. At the top—at Tattersall's—you hear in plain vernacular, 'Gentlemen, here's no reserve. She's the best blood in England, and she's to be sold ;' but lower down Grosvenor Place the same kind of deal is carried on, only in the language of eyes, and in divers conventional innuendoes, delicately attuned to ears polite."

After parting from Snipe, the result of this, as well as sundry other remarks, was, that a clear stream of light began to break in upon the mind of Walford:—

1. Lady Colville was looking out for a young man of fortune and estate. So far, the rent-roll and the name of Richcourt Manor, all would suit.

2. Lady Colville expected to be the richer, or in some way the better—whether in pride or purse, it little mattered—for joining two large fortunes together.

3. Snipe was the very man “marked and quoted” as a go-between. He expected to be paid, of course; and seeing it quite useless to urge his own suit, it was very like Tom to shift his ground and seek a picking by forwarding the suit of some other person.

Tom had not said all this, it is true; but he had ingeniously explained that such things were not usually expressed, but understood. Tom had also dropped the term, “open to a commission.” Again, he had dwelt upon the fact, that a lady of fortune was always taken in hand—to be played off as a high card in the game of any one who had sufficient power or influence.

By the time of life at which Walford had then arrived, and by the insight afforded by Dick Cheston’s conversations, as well as the traditional accumulations of the smoking-room at Melton, Walford had become well aware how men did positively live by their wits—more especially as he knew that that consisted in being asked to do things that no gentleman ever dare ask, and in doing things which no gentleman ever dare to do: but all depends on the art of suggestion, and the scrupulous avoidance of all tradesmanlike terms and commercial expressions.

If Tom had said in plain words that he had a commission from Lady Colville to dispose of

the heart and hand of Miss Lindsay, neither Walford nor any other man alive would have believed him. Had Tom gone on to say that, like other highly honourable agents, he expected also a commission from the other side—whether the happy man were Walford or any one else—Walford would have treated the observation as a jest, or else he would have turned away in disgust. But simply because Tom caused the self-same ideas to effect a spontaneous lodgment in Walford's mind, Walford took it all like a man of the world, and forthwith proceeded to consider the probable detail of the plot—how it could be brought to bear;—and, first of all, how he could contrive, next time they met, clearly to let Tom Snipe understand that the bargain suited his book, and that he should like to go further into the matter without more delay.

Some persons will at once set Walford down as the vilest of fortune-hunters; only it is fair to remember that Walford had himself a fortune, too. We have already said that Walford was smitten by the looks of Miss Lindsay; and the idea of an heiress, the admired of all admirers—or, a love-chase with a very large field, all panting to be first—this, to say nothing of Miss Lindsay's mine of untold wealth, and all its fascina-

tions, has an unconquerable tendency to fever the pulse and whet the energies of the dullest man alive.

But what was Snipe about? Of what was he thinking?

Snipe was also thinking how he should make move the next. He did not doubt that he had made an impression; so he sent Walford a note to say that, having returned from Chester Square, he should be glad to see him without more delay, and proposed to drop in upon him about breakfast-time next morning.

The only meaning of this note was to set Walford's hopes and fears going of themselves in the very direction in which Tom wanted them to go—well knowing that no reasoning is half as effective as the natural suggestions of the mind you desire to influence.

When Tom came to breakfast, Walford had already worked himself into a fever of excitement, and expected that Snipe would begin with his very first breath to disclose something relative to Miss Lindsay. Instead of which, Tom came in looking rather quieter than usual, and wore a look of such exceeding annoyance and disgust that Walford could not help asking, "What was the matter? Had anything gone wrong?"

" You may well ask that, my good fellow,"

replied Tom : “ups and downs have been the rule of my life. To see clear round the corner of next week, is quite a long look-out a-head to a man like me ; but just at present, everything seems gone to the bad—all at once.”

“And you mean to say, you are quite out of humour with all the world ?”

“Out of humour ! I am, indeed. I am utterly disgusted at this moment. I could even say, in the spirit of Caligula, ‘I wish all the world had one body, that I might kick it.’”

“When a fast man talks like that, his next speech is likely to be, ‘I am very short of money, and I hope you’ll lend me some.’”

Of this Walford was so well aware, that he proceeded forthwith to talk about his pecuniary difficulties, too ; well knowing that the best possible way to stop a man from asking you to lend him any money, is to say you want to borrow some.

However, it soon came out that Tom never had been so hard up before ; that cut and run he must ; though a fifty-pound note—a mere trifle—would keep him afloat past Goodwood, on the events of which he had such a book as would set all square for a year to come.

Up to this time, Tom had never once pressed Walford for money. But now he appeared in a

new character, pleading, with some appearance of feeling, that Walford had been a very good friend to him, timely staving off far more difficulties than he had any idea of, on many occasions ; and, indeed, that there was no service so great that he should not feel it a positive pleasure to render him.

These last words were said with that peculiar emphasis which set Walford's heart in a flutter. Walford was not the man to say "No," to a friend. He had quite generosity enough for easy times ; and since in a few months he must raise some money for his own necessities, fifty pounds, more or less, would make no very great difference. These reflections would alone have been sufficient ; but, at this critical moment, Tom's services were far too valuable to be lost.

No sooner had Walford set Tom's mind at rest, than Tom proceeded to gladden his ears with the news that the first question Lady Colville asked the day before was, "Who was that quiet, elegant-looking man, who, as Miss Lindsay tells me, took your arm at Childs' door?" Also, that this question answered, was followed by another about Richcourt Manor ; for she had heard it mentioned as about twenty thousand a-year! Tom had said all things tempting, and all things pleasant, and the result was, that

he should have no difficulty in introducing Walford at Lady Colville's house.

“*Ut pictura poesis*”—It is with effective composition as with a picture, says Horace: and no reader would thank us if we were to dwell with equal minuteness on every part of Edward Walford's adventures—when the course of love begins to run smooth, the action of the Drama can hardly be too rapid—to attempt to give equal prominence to every figure in your painting would obviously result in giving interest to none.

The history of a true love-match is exciting to the last: but a mere money-match is as dull as a walk over the course, when every one is impatient for the bell to announce the next race.

There are simply a few points in the arrangements which it is necessary to relate:—

That after two or three interviews and some of those quiet evenings, with a little music, and just enough noise to make soft things inaudible, Snipe one day led Walford to Doctors' Commons, about the narrow courts of which Tom seemed to know his way much better than Walford supposed. Tom had often been there before: he was one of those wary characters of the London season who hunt out all that can be learnt of a young lady's fortune, and disseminate

nate such information as will greatly qualify or heighten her attractions — while the simple-minded fair seeks in vain for anything in her manners or her millinery to account for the change in those about her.

No sooner had they paid their shillings for admittance, than Snipe took a slip of paper from his pocket, giving one of the clerks the exact clue to the particular round-backed volume, which contained “all that was mortal” of the late Jeremiah Lindsay.

“And is this where the Wills are? And all those shelves of uniform ledgers of sombre colour—what do they contain?”

“What? you may well ask ‘What.’ Why, they contain—if we were only indulged with a digest—the queerest history of human nature that ever was written. The intentions of the departed, when filtered through the lawyers, are far more presentable than they would otherwise be: but where men have left Wills of their own making—the old stories of the halter bequeathed to one sanguine heir, that he might hang himself, or of *The Whole Duty of Man* to teach another to behave himself—these are a faint sample of the combustibles to set whole families in a blaze, which many of these black books contain.”

Mr. Lindsay's Will was short and simple; the only long clause in it was one that filled up nearly all the parchment—a recital of all the various investments which his executors should realise or hold. One remark Tom read with an emphasis; it ran nearly thus:—“And, because I am well aware that a set of vile fortune-hunters ever will beset young women of large estate —”

“I say, Walford, what would the old boy say if he could only see us now?”

The remainder of the clause settled Miss Lindsay's fortune upon her, free from the control of any husband; directing also that, under pain of forfeiture, she should marry no one who could not settle 10,000*l.* of his own property upon her.

Here was a clause to which Snipe pointed very significantly, remarking—“This makes the field very select. Lots of fellows were ready to join in the chase, but here was a stiff fence that pounded them all at the very first throw off.”

“Never mind that,” said Walford; “I would willingly make a proper settlement. However, it is evident that there is no exaggeration about the extent of the lady's fortune: so far, all is well.”

Miss Lindsay appeared one of those ladies who are reserved at first, and steal gradually on the affections—not very talkative, but occa-

sionally saying, especially at Snipe's expense, some of the most strange and telling things that Walford had ever heard. So, Walford began to think that a very clever wife is a qualified advantage—one that may not be very favourable to the balance of power in realms matrimonial. Lady Colville seemed rather quiet—being then indisposed and out of spirits. Snipe seemed quite in her Ladyship's confidence, and conveyed all explanations to save her Ladyship fatigue. So, as Lady Colville represented Miss Lindsay, Tom represented Lady Colville. In due season, Tom was deputed to take Walford to her Ladyship's solicitor, to arrange all that was suitable on such occasions. Snipe was one trustee, and Miss Lindsay named another.

Almost immediately after the first introduction, Lady Colville was in great grief from the apprehended demise of a near relation; and Snipe explained, "that the sooner the match was arranged the better."

There are very few young men but would be happy to hear this.—The wedding-breakfast, speeches, and a couple of hours of staring curiosity; after which *exit* the bride, with every trace of beauty drowned in tears—this any young lady, before she is engaged, may contemplate as a triumphal procession, of which she

is to be the heroine ; but the gentlemen detest the very thoughts of it.

So Walford jumped at the proposal of a private wedding. He said with Snipe, that he liked things done as soon as thought of ; and enjoyed the idea of a complete surprise to the scrutinising and inquisitive people about Richcourt, when the marriage was first read in the *Morning Post*.

So all went smoothly enough—indeed, almost too smoothly to be interesting, had not Walford's hopes and fears been periodically excited by a suspicion, first that the proud Sir Wormwood Scrubbs, Bart, and afterwards that Lord Nomansland, were trying hard to weigh their sonorous titles and trees genealogical against the rent-roll and the timber of Richcourt Manor. At the same time, a certain heavy settling-day was drawing near, and nothing could furnish a better excuse to his creditors than that he was off on a sentimental journey. Walford naturally thought—as many others do—that, when once married, all things would right themselves. He could then no longer have the slightest scruple to call on Sir Buller, his Trustee, to make definite arrangements ; and meanwhile his bride's account at Childs' would make all things smooth and pleasant.

But a courtship is at all times a very dull affair to lookers-on—indeed, for the most part, the slower it seems, the faster it is progressing. When least is said, most mischief's done; and as to the fire from lovers' eyes, a masked battery is the most killing of all assaults. And this affair was so peculiarly uninteresting, that we must at once relate that the day appointed came at last; and as to the way it passed off, and all that came of this unsentimental alliance, we must take breath before we proceed to break the news to the sympathetic reader in another chapter.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHETHER MARRIED OR MARRED, IT IS HARD
TO SAY.

As the day drew near for the wedding, Walford did not seem quite as happy as Snipe expected. The bride, it was admitted, possessed just that style of beauty most captivating to Walford. Every man has his peculiar style of countenance—every man carries in his mind's eye a peculiar type, and is fired with admiration the moment he sees any one to correspond. Still, there was something in Miss Lindsay that did not improve upon acquaintance. It might be that the butterfly loses its charm by being caught; or, according to Snipe's oft-repeated theory of womankind, it might be that their fascinations are only a providential *ruse* to make man quaff the fatal cup—too flat and insipid

to tempt any one, did not nature connive at presenting it in a state of sparkling effervescence?

Walford had agreed to marry without being in love; he had resolved on a match of convenience, and the fractious child was now disappointed to find that he could not have the joys of true affection too.

Still, the settlement had been signed, and the licence was ready,—the four horses were ordered, and the parson and clerk had the customary notice. Snipe was all alive as the master of the ceremonies, and Walford was assured that it was quite natural to feel a little nervous and unsettled—every man must allow for a change coming over the spirit of his dream on such momentous occasions. Snipe added, How many fellows, with the *entrée* of Almacs' and the first society in town, will be mad with vexation to find that the name of Richcourt has weighed down all their beggarly titles!

This was always the topic to stir Walford up. He was delighted at the idea that he should now take undisputed lead, outbid all the yard at Tattersall's, and hunt the county in first-rate style.

Next morning,—the happy day!—Snipe, as arranged, came to a quiet breakfast at Fenton's,

priming Walford with a sip of brandy as well as champagne ; it being arranged, on account of the indisposition of Lady Colville, that Miss Lindsay should appear at the church in her travelling dress, accompanied by her friends in an equally quiet costume ; and as soon as the service was over they could gallop off in time to catch the train at Watford on their way to Leamington.

Arrived at St. James's Church, Walford waited about ten minutes in the vestry, in that state of nervous tremor which the gentlemen feel quite as much as the ladies on such occasions. Then the clerk announced that "there were some of them come—lookers-on, he supposed, otherwise it was not much of a wedding to have a licence for." Snipe looked out of the door, and said, "All right, my good fellow ; come along—come, don't be nervous ;" and in a moment Walford found himself sidled up to the altar, and duly placed at the side of the lady by the clerk, who generally instructs the bewildered couple where to stand.

The marriage service, clipped and pared down to the dimensions deemed sufficient in certain churches of the present day, is brief enough ; and Walford found himself bound for "better or for worse," and back into the vestry, almost before he knew where he was. How-

ever, he signed his name in both the registers as usual ; and having done so, just as he was handing the pen to the lady, Snipe pulled him aside rather more roughly than his custom was, intimating that he should have a delicacy in letting others see what he paid the Clergyman, Clerk, Sexton, and Bell-ringer, Pew-opener—with Carpet-spreader extra—for their ingenious little list of customary fees.

This done, the lady was already coming out of the vestry-room ; and, to Walford's utter astonishment, she shook Tom cordially by the hand, put on a most expressive cast of countenance, and saying to Walford, “I suppose the carriage is at the further door ?”—took Snipe’s arm, told Mrs. Brown to pair off with the Bridegroom, and walked, chuckling and laughing with Tom, down the church !

Arrived at the carriage, she stepped lightly and well-satisfied in ; and as Walford, in all his confusion, disgust, and bewilderment, was stepping in after her, she exclaimed,—

“ What ! are you coming ?—Well, I suppose it must be so for the present.” At the same time, looking at Tom, whose countenance was quite a study for a painter.

“ Oh, yes ! ” said Tom ; “ you must not forget you are to be an ensample of godly and

pious matrons : " and so saying, he slammed-to the door, and the postillions, as usual, went off at a rattling pace ; but not before Snipe had caught one glimpse of the happy pair !

That glimpse revealed to him such a picture of the earliest moments of married life as, for the credit of human nature, we hope is rather rare, even in this strange and perverse generation. In the countenance of the Bride you might have seen triumphant and defiant exultation, mingled with vengeful hate and pitiless contempt ; while the Bridegroom, all aghast at the very suddenness of his horror, was cowering beneath the blighting spell ;—you would have thought that some enchantment had, till that moment, concealed the crested venom of the serpent beneath the unruffled plumage of the dove.

Walford's own account of this first start on his wedding tour, as related a few months after, reveals some curious knowledge of the twitchings and contortions to which, by the cruelty of fortune, the heart of man may possibly adapt itself.

At first he was bewildered, and struck dumb and astounded. Where was he ? What had happened ? Dreaming or awake ? Was it the champagne and brandy, to which he was

quite unused at such an early hour? Was it a joke of Tom Snipe and the lady, to be soon laughed away, causing all the more joy for the contrast with the real love and happiness in store? No—no—the looks were too real—the feeling too deep for that fond hope. Then, what had he done? Mad? Yes, mad! He had married a mad woman. Was this the first of her paroxysms, after a long lucid interval? No—no—there was too much method here for madness.

He tried to draw near her—to take her hand—tried to soothe—to fondle her. He implored her to explain. What was the meaning of it all? Had she married against her will?—Then, at last, he began to give way to anger. But this was the greatest mistake of all. Shut up—boxed up in a carriage—in undeniably close quarters, and no escape from the burst of indignant fury he had thus provoked, Walford soon found that, within these firmly-compressed lips, there was a pent-up torrent of bitter feeling to come flooding forth. Were it a question of bodily strength, Walford might be confident enough; but when the war is at the heart, and the very depths of the soul are stirred within, we find there is a mighty battery in the human breast, and the boldest cowers before the

angry flashings of the human eye and the deep tones of surging passion.

However, the longest day must have an end: and though the pen is powerless to reveal more—suffice it to say, that day, however long, seemed far too short for the slightest change in that woman's abiding hate and aversion to her husband. Neither did hour after hour cause the slightest bending of her cold determination to leave him still in all the distraction of doubt, without the slightest clue of explanation.—The Bridegroom wished himself out of the carriage—the Bride, but for certain prudential considerations, the more effectually to accomplish her deep-laid scheme, would never have stepped into it at all.

* * * *

Next morning, at an early hour, Walford heard, beneath his chamber-window, the sound of wheels, and of steps pulling down, and the usual symptoms of a departure from the hotel. He rose hastily to look out: there was a carriage, and into that carriage stepped Mrs. Edward Walford—at the same time putting a letter into the waiter's hand.

Walford listened: he heard her say to the driver, “Be sure you are in time for the train to London.” She drove away!

The letter was immediately brought up-stairs, and delivered to Walford. Tearing it open with trembling hand, he read these words :—

“ The wrongs of a woman, a woman has avenged. Vile man ! Now, go ! pursue your false and selfish will ! Now hunt wealth or title, if you dare ! Know this—*you have married the sister of ALICE HENGEN !*

“ HANNAH WALFORD.”

CHAPTER XVII.

EXPLANATIONS.

THAT Ned Walford had been the dupe of an unblushing and artful conspiracy on the part of Tom Snipe and Hannah Hengen is evident enough. Still it was a plot that, in the first place, they rather stumbled on than devised. If there was real greatness in this achievement—we speak, of course, in the language of Jonathan Wild the Great—then was “greatness thrust upon them.” Snipe could truly say, like Rickworth, that if he had been guilty of treason against his sometime master, “treason lay in his way, and he found it,” as will soon appear.

We have already said that Hannah Hengen had, from her earliest years, been “marked and quoted” as one of those women who occasionally

surprise the world with the originality and the daring of their deep-laid schemes.

We need simply explain,—

1. That Hannah had at this time the highest incentive to bring all the powers of her wild and vengeful nature into action, living as she did in one state of cruel irritation, with all her feelings centered on the one great purpose of her life—how to make Walford at once rue the wrong he had done the unhappy Alice, if she could not exact from him funds to avert the poverty which was looming more and more darkly in the distance.

2. Snipe, we know, was a man capable of anything, and if this plot would appear rather too severe upon Walford, we must remember that there was a certain sporting quality in the act — there was the “sharp practice” and the “fast” element in the manœuvre which redeemed it from the vulgarity of common fraud, and placed it rather in the category of first-rate practical jokes. Besides, the invention was Hannah’s, and by no means Snipe’s; and she could truly cry, “All’s fair; tit for tat. You have duped one sister; the other sister has now duped you.” At the same time we must not forget that Snipe bore no good feeling towards Walford. However prudentially Snipe had concealed his resentment, he was sorely offended

with Walford for the way in which he had cast him off for another tutor, and taken up with Dick Cheston in sporting circles. We have seen, also, that Snipe's course was almost run, and without some rich scheme successfully planned and carried out—he must very shortly hide his head in poverty and seclusion.

Also, seeing that the writer of Ned Walford's adventures *pledges himself* that, from his own limited experience, he could name no less than *three* adventuresses who severally victimised three gentlemen of good standing and worldly experience; it is not unlikely that Hannah's invention might have been quickened by some such precedent too.

And if so, was it not a very tempting position? Was there no suggestion akin to the truth, that “the means to do ill deeds makes ill deeds done,” when Snipe suddenly discovered that Walford had mistaken Hannah Hengen for Miss Lindsay at the door of Childs' bank, and that lady had also been informed of the mistake —one so suggestive of a female stratagem?

But, how came Snipe to be acquainted with Hannah Hengen, and to be on friendly terms with good Mrs. Belmont, so as to be able to pass her off as Lady Colville?

This is easily explained;—as Snipe was a

man ever beating up for new acquaintances, he followed Alice Hengen to her retreat in Eaton Square, and easily ingratiated himself — with proffer of his services, with virtuous indignation at the baseness of the run-away lover, as also with the information he could supply of Walford's movements, to say nothing of all the tact and pleasantry by which such men worm their way wherever they go?

Hannah Hengen, however distrustful, had never been utterly without hope that, by some happy fortune, she might once more bring Walford and Alice together. The chance might seem small, but “while there's life there's hope.” The restless thoughts of Hannah had nothing else on which to prey, but schemes for getting Walford in her power, or perhaps, by the potent spell of her resistless energy, to compel him once to look upon and to repair the mental havoc he had wrought on a poor, defenceless girl.

When, therefore, Hannah heard that Walford was paying his addresses to Miss Harwood, near Richcourt, and not only so, but also that, the moment this second victim of his faithlessness was out of sight, he was joining in the selfish pursuit of Miss Lindsay, who lived in the same [Eaton] Square as her dear deserted Alice — her indignation knew no bounds, and we cannot

wonder that she should put forth all her powers to avenge what seemed the wrongs, not more of her sister than of woman-kind.

As to any difficulty that might arise in representing Mrs. Belmont as Lady Colville—the pretence of indisposition and family trouble—when Tom Snipe and Hannah were both so deeply interested in fencing, or explaining away, any unlucky word or observation—were quite enough to prevent the veil dropping from Walford's eyes.

The greatest difficulty of all was in Hannah's fiery spirit so far restraining its glowing indignation as coolly to go through her part. She made a very poor lover, indeed : so much so, that Snipe's persuasive powers were much wanted to represent the lady when most cold as most coy. Indeed, Snipe once ludicrously assured Walford that he must not take his ideas of courtship from the torrid regions of the Haymarket or the Olympic theatres, but must allow for the less dramatic positions and higher altitudes of fashionable life.

But Alice—poor Alice ! you were the greatest difficulty of all : though the affair was carried on more out of doors than within—to keep you utterly in the dark about the whole affair—and this was no easy matter. It was a matter so dif-

ficult that no disappointed young lady—no young lady whose experience enables her in any way to sympathise with Alice, will readily believe it could ever be accomplished. With young ladies in a certain state of agonised and high-strung feeling, there is a nerve in the heart, if not in the brain, so acutely sensitive that even the faintest traces of their lover will be read, even in looks and tones beyond the ken of mortal organs in a flatter key. But we grieve to say, that already a certain change had come over the unhappy girl, which rendered her less difficult to manage than she would have been at an earlier stage of her heart-consuming sorrow.

We might have mentioned before, that new symptoms had been discerned in regard to Mrs. Belmont's health, and there was every inducement to hasten the marriage as fast as possible, without exciting Walford's suspicions. It was indeed a most nervous and a most critical moment. A single day might make the difference, whether Hannah should be turned, with her afflicted and helpless sister, upon the wide world of London ; or whether Mrs. Belmont should live a little longer in the unconscious personation of Lady Colville, till Hannah had not only gratified her resentment against Walford, but had

also secured a settlement to qualify the injury he had done.

In Hannah's feelings of resentment, therefore, there was much to palliate, though nothing can excuse them. With any principle less lax than that which looks to the end to justify the means, Hannah would have shrunk instinctively from the cool and systematic deceit that could alone have carried such a plot into execution. Still, she had honour enough to resolve that, for herself, she would have none of Walford's money—no, he should pay for her sister's maintenance, and nothing more. He had robbed Alice of all capacity to earn her bread, and therefore she would rigidly exact as much as would be a righteous and a fair equivalent.

If Hannah was ever likely to have any scruples, those scruples were quickly swept away in the pressing exigencies that, within a few days of the marriage, encompassed her round about. Mrs. Belmont died. The relatives walked proudly and triumphantly in; and Hannah, anticipating nothing less than the retaliation her own imperious conduct had provoked, removed with her sister into apartments at Kensington.

Meanwhile, Snipe and his friend received notice from Walford that he should dispute the

validity of the marriage, and that it was at their peril that they paid any dividends on the ten thousand pounds to Hannah Hengen.—Yes: Hannah Hengen; for—"Hannah Walford he would prove she was not."

Hannah's difficulties, therefore, seemed not at an end: Snipe, also, had done nothing for himself, either. He had been actuated by greed as well as malice; but now found that, as to dividing the plunder with Hannah, this was an idea better suited to his principles and to his way of thinking than to hers. He soon learnt she had a soul above plunder, and that Walford's dividends would be applied to her sister's maintenance alone. The marriage was a conspiracy; the deed of settlement was the result of a conspiracy, too. "Hard cases make bad law." And when a man's conscience tells him he does not deserve a verdict, he is always afraid that the judge within his breast, and the judge upon the bench, will express very similar sentiments.

Something, therefore, must be done. What should he do? Should he propose a compromise? Should he side with Walford? Should he make light of the marriage, as a sheer practical joke, and assist him with his evidence of

collusion in setting it aside, and thus get a hold upon him and his estate ever after?

This idea did float through the mind of so arch a deceiver: still, there was an obvious difficulty.—Walford, while the marriage held good, had little inducement to listen to him; and if the marriage were once set aside, why should he not say, “Mr. Snipe, I never desire to set eyes on you again?”

But even as the alchemists, missing the philosopher’s stone to turn lead into gold, stumbled upon many an invaluable discovery—even so did Snipe, from the very wreck of one crumbling project, catch the outline of another of a far more substantial description.

No sooner did Walford find himself deserted by his very extraordinary Bride, than he wrote to Snipe for explanations. We may easily suppose that the letter was violent enough, and penned on the presumption that any explanation exculpatory of Snipe was quite impossible. At the same time he said that, though such a marriage must, doubtless, be void, still it was shameful to be so treated: but that, since the marriage had not yet been announced to his friends, he hoped that the worst part—the very sting of the injury—might yet be averted.

And he trusted that his confidence in Snipe had not been so utterly misplaced as that he had gone so far as to insert an advertisement also. Walford ended—as such writers do—much more mildly than he commenced, asking what could have prompted such a hoax, and what arts there were in reserve to repair the injury he had already done? At the same time, Walford gave notice that the deed, like the marriage, must be set aside, too.

No sooner did Snipe receive this letter than he had a conference with the lawyer, Mr. Slide. We need not here say what passed, further than that the legality of the marriage was very doubtful, and the validity of the deed of settlement was yet more so. The deed, he had no doubt, was voidable in equity; but, of the marriage, he would advise opinion of counsel to be taken.

But Mr. Slide added something more, which made Snipe, with all his impudence and effrontery, change colour.

"This is an awkward business, Mr. Snipe, in its present position. You and your co-trustee, as well as the lady, were aware that the annuity was secured by collusion.—What if the gentleman should turn round, and indict you all for a conspiracy to defraud? Think of that!"

" But what would your part be?"

" Perfectly clear—trust me for that. I have had nothing to do with the execution of the deed—your written instructions were to prepare a settlement as for one Eliza Lindsay; and I did prepare it. If you made a fraudulent use of it—if you thought proper actually to prepare a similar deed with another name, and giving him one deed to read and another deed to sign, that is your affair, and a very ugly affair, too!"

Hereupon Snipe looked rather blue: at last he started, as if a bright idea struck him.

Mr. Slide looked thoughtful, too: Mr. Slide was well aware that Snipe was "in a fix" also; that, shape what questions Snipe would, the one point only at issue was,—What turn could be given to the affair that should render Snipe's services indispensable to Walford, or in any way give him a hold upon Richcourt Manor for years to come?

At last Snipe jumped up, clapped his hands, gave a whistle, and cried, "*Eureka!* I have hit it! I must contrive to—to ——" and then he whispered one or two pregnant words, as if to try Slide's sagacity in filling up the sentence, ending with,—

" No one can, possibly, be more capable of bringing this delicate little affair to a satis-

factory termination than Mr. Slide of Lyon's Inn, Solicitor-at-Law."

" Ha ! ha !" said Mr. Slide, brightening up at the same time. " Really, you are quite a genius, Mr. Snipe ! You would have done great things had you been brought up to our profession—I am sure you would—ha ! ha !"

A little more conversation followed ; all tending to impress on the mind of Snipe that he could not stop where he was : he had either done a great deal too little or a great deal too much. At length he said,—

" Among the ancient Persians, as Herodotus tells us, a man who had done the state some service used to be written down *Euergetes* ; that is to say, he had his name in the king's good books. From that day forth, if he ever got into a scrape, this balance of merit was always allowed as a sufficient set-off."

" But I think," said Mr. Slide, " you are already in this gentleman's bad books."

" Never mind," said Tom ; " there is room just now for doing him a favour at a vital point—in his utmost need."

" But what do you say of the part you have already taken in this matrimonial affair ?"

Snipe had a solution for this difficulty also, as will appear in another chapter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WALFORD DECIDES ON MILD MEASURES.

SNIPE now proceeded to reply to Walford's letter, before there was any chance of a personal interview producing an angry rupture between them. The strain of his letter was nine parts humorous to one part apologetic. He said, that after Walford's Melton experience, as well as his familiarity with the sharp-shooting and chaff of the most knowing and wide-awake men in town, and practical jokes without end—he really should have thought that Walford would have seen at a glance that a sham match was like the sham duelling in a certain regiment—something to be serious about for the day, but to laugh at on the morrow. The idea of advertising as a marriage what was no marriage at all—especially after his (Snipe's) injunction

not to mention the affair to any one—was a notion that should never have entered Walford's mind. However, Walford must not think he had the honour of the invention. It was entirely the invention of Hannah Hengen—a plot suggested and grafted on to the mistake at Childs' door, which he had casually mentioned to her the same evening. As to Hannah Hengen, she was one of the most wonderful women of her day. She developed the plan as if by intuition. As to the aid he had given her, he did so at first to humour one of the strangest freaks and fancies that any woman ever had conceived, but without the least idea she would have been able to carry it through. But what was fairer than afterwards to let the silly woman *go on simply to hoax herself!*—Really, Walford ought to be exceedingly obliged to him. Half the men of his set would have been delighted with such a chance—the lady believing she was a wife—the gentleman at liberty to play fast and loose, and to bid her adieu as soon as he pleased!

Snipe ended by saying, that if any lurking uneasiness remained, more than he could laugh away over a glass of wine at their next meeting, he would simply suggest a visit to Mr. Slide; though, if that gentleman received him not quite with as

serious a face as on a former occasion, he must not be surprised. However, the best point in the character of a lawyer was, that he could always keep a secret. He (Snipe) also could do the same. Though really the joke was so triumphant in all its parts—such an instance of woman's wit, and certainly a very fair tit for tat on the part of Alice's sister—that if once it did get wind, the *Morning Post* would have a leader upon it, and the “Heir of Richcourt” would be the one and only topic of the London season.

This last hint was telling in the extreme. It was like saying, “Now, pray don't be savage, or you'll make the case ten thousand times worse.” That the hoax was too good not to circulate, was evident enough; and Walford was the very last man to afford being laughed at. He was already more than half afraid that men thought him a slow fellow; and, with this want of self-confidence, he was quite at the mercy of the unblushing impudence of Snipe.

At the same time, feeling a sudden relief at hearing he had been the dupe of nothing worse than a joke—as also delighted at the thoughts that the tables were turned upon the lady, who had been simply assisted in hoaxing herself—he resolved on meeting Snipe with some kind of good humour; more especially as

he, more than ever, required his services, and did not dare to quarrel with him.

This resolution was no little confirmed by his visit to Mr. Slide, who, by that time, had had an opportunity of arriving at a more decided opinion as to the Marriage Law.

Mr. Slide, therefore, on the announcement of Ned Walford—looking rather like the “Knight of the Rueful Countenance”—was exceedingly merry and facetious.—He laughed at the very idea of a licence with a false name, and also with a Bride who was in reality one character but personated another, constituting a legal, valid marriage—a point on which he had had ample time for taking a sound opinion—indeed, he would send Walford a case in point. He proceeded to talk about “fast life”—“Life in London”—and suggested that, with a little more worldly experience — (this was, at all times, a very sore point with Walford)—he might be better guarded against practical jokes; though, in the present instance, the real fun of the matter was, that the lady had been allowed to ventilate her ingenuity and her spite, and still would take nothing by the motion. Of course, as to the deed—and this was afterwards confirmed by counsel—he said it was all waste paper; and “fancy her rage when she finds that,

as to her half-year's dividend, she might as well have a draft upon Aldgate Pump!"

Walford was now in that state of mind and feeling which can only be expressed by the vernacular phrase, that "he was utterly disgusted"—out of taste, out of humour, and out of relish with himself and others. He had found the world at large as little complimentary and as little deferential as he found Oxford. Once more he learnt the unwelcome truth, that all the higher pleasures of life—moving harmoniously in his proper orbit, bold in the honour and respect of himself and others, walking in the sunshine of sympathy, and smiles that meet smiles again—that with joys and satisfactions such as these the name of Richcourt Manor had little indeed to do. But without them—without the honour that attaches to place and position, what is it all worth? "An empty pageant, signifying nothing!"

Melton he had tried, but did not half enjoy. At Tattersall's he was almost ashamed to appear, so frequent was the banter about his losings, with covert intimations of his being a flat and taken it. In the Clubs and London society generally he felt of no importance but as a name for a Sweepstakes, or as "the man with the purse:" on which occasions only men of that

order of society to which he aspired cared even to cross the room to exchange a word.

And now this hoax matrimonial was a cruel insult, excruciating to his feelings and excoriating to his pride—the story seemed so good a one, and therefore so very likely to get wind. The more he thought of Snipe the more he hated him. His excuse was lame in the extreme: besides, what right had a penniless fellow like him—what right had he to presume on practical jokes? Still, all this seemed very strange—very unlike Snipe's usual conduct towards him. There must be some malice, or something more than at present appeared in the matter.

However, grievously as he was offended, to quarrel with Snipe just then was to throw away the last chance of avoiding the stinging ridicule which the story would excite; indeed, it was clearly in Snipe's power to laugh him out of all society.—Society? Why, Miss Lindsay was becoming part and parcel of society, and if once his name were so ridiculously associated with hers, his doom would be world-wide infamy as a fortune-hunter and with world-wide contempt as a fool!

He resolved therefore, as soon as he could, to give up London life, to settle quietly on his own acres at Richcourt, and to scratch his name from

that race of “fast” men and of fashionables for which he sadly missed the early training, and could by no means “go the pace.”

By the time he had arrived at this state of feeling, Snipe, having heard from Mr. Slide that Walford was, if not in the best of humours, at all events still no longer dangerous, thought it time to break the ice, though a cold and shivering operation, and to make his appearance at Fenton’s. He pretended that he had just come to report the grand news of the lady’s extreme disgust at finding she had caught at a shadow and lost a substance—had not gained a fortune, but had lost her reputation! and that instead of being married, she was beyond all doubt marred in all her female hopes and prospects.

From this topic he ran into the only other of a palatable character—the complete secrecy of the whole affair, as Hannah dare not mention it; and of course, as to himself, he would not dream of such a thing: but at worst, it was but a case of the biter bit, and the adventuress outwitted, and Walford’s reputation as a sharp fellow would rather gain by an “affair” which left all the advantage on his side.

With this conversation Walford was rather soothed and quieted. Before, he hardly dared to show himself, or take up a newspaper for fear

of reading his own shame in the first column that met his eye ; but now, he began to think that no great harm was done after all.

A few days after, Walford's confidence was yet farther assured by receiving a very friendly letter and invitation from Lady Harwood, who had come to town with her daughter for the season.

This move was rather like following Walford to London ; though, of course, when there, other young men of fortune might come forward while he was or was not thinking about it. However, we are not fond of reflecting on what are called "match-making mothers." We make all fair allowance for the parental instinct ; we render all due honour to the fine, well-feathered, cackling bird who pecks eagerly for the chickens under her wing ; and if in these artificial days it has come to pass that the only practicable form of pecking — the only means of providing food for the young, or feathering their nest, is in choosing a fit mate to do so for them, there is little enough to laugh at here.

If any one would be so unfeeling as to laugh at birds of Lady Harwood's feather, he would do well to consider the toil and trouble that they patiently undergo in their pursuits. Yes, we may appositely quote,— "Bubble, bubble ;

toil and trouble." All the London season they have fag and fatigue by day, anxiety and disappointment by night. First, there is the doubt about visits they shall receive, or the calls and attentions from the most desirable set; then there is a harassing uncertainty about cutting the proper figure in the Gardens and the Parks, and receiving the most complimentary invitations in the first place. At last comes the wished-for night of Lady Dasher's ball. Till nearly twelve o'clock may the anxious mother doze and yawn before it is time for her carriage. Arrived at the house, there await her some three hours' squeezing and being squeezed—crushing of dresses and being crushed; wading (if haply she can move at all) about in a sea of muslin. All the time her charming daughter is mortified by the want of a beau even to lead her out to form one of those bobbing or whirling victims of so-called Society, who, in an atmosphere of 80°, keep each other in countenance at that caricature of dancing, which, out of the circle of fashionable delusion, would be hardly consistent with the habits of the sane. At last comes the lady of the house: "Dear me, you are not dancing! Allow me to introduce —," and all in a minute "there appears"—(a lady friend thus expressed it)—"a perfect little horror, short and stunted—all

front and affectation—a mere boy—‘a younger son of a younger brother’—a non-entity—a nobody; and my dear daughter’s only other partner was not much better! ”

We “ pity the sorrows of a poor ” middle-aged lady, who endures so much and takes so little, seeing, even at the great ball of the season, an integral portion of her daughter’s time and opportunities—with no little wear and tear, and wrack of flowers and of finery—thrown so bootlessly away.

Lady Harwood deeming it her first duty to her daughter to “ get her off her hands,” was accordingly in London for that very purpose: with what results will soon appear.

When Walford came to dinner, her ladyship said she proposed taking him to an evening party—not a crowded ball, “only a few friends, with a little dancing.”

All went very pleasantly at dinner; so much so that Walford began to recover the blow he had received, inwardly smiling at his unreasonable alarms lest the hoax should take wing.

But no sooner was he seated in the carriage than Lady Harwood remarked, “There will be a great attraction at the party this evening—the rich heiress, Miss Lindsay, chaperoned by that eminent tactician, Lady Colville. Pray do you

happen to know anything of them, Mr. Walford?"

Walford felt ready to drop. Was this a sly and satirical question, or was it a casual observation? But what could he do? Escape was impossible. He must stand his chance, and learn his fate once for all. But what if Lady Colville had heard of it? Her wit and satirical powers were well known. She was one of those ladies who could hold her ground—and very slippery footing, too—backed by the indulgence of the gentlemen against all the sneers and every innuendo that Belgravian prudery could hint against her. How could he face her and Miss Lindsay? How could her ladyship do otherwise than present "the real Miss Lindsay this time," and thank him with mock politeness for his most complimentary intentions?"

All this ran through his mind, though the carriage wheels ran round, too: and his deliberations served only to occupy his thoughts till the moment came which would solve all doubts. Lady Harwood never had so fine an opportunity as that evening afforded. Walford was for the first half hour in fear and trembling. He dreaded the sound of his own name, looking nervously round to see if it provoked the smile which would seal his fate for ever. All he could

do to hide his confusion was to occupy himself with little attentions to Miss Harwood, and turning over a book of prints, while his eye swam over the surface with his thoughts far away.

It wanted but little to fire the feelings of Walford with admiration of the young lady, and this little that evening was well calculated to supply. He was out of temper and exasperated with all the world—which means that select circle in which he moved between the parallels of Regent Street and Belgrave Square. But the quiet, the healthful, and the kindly sympathies of Miss Harwood—feelings which her intuitive perception of his unhappiness could not fail to make more genial still—were like balm to his sorrows and the oil of gladness to his wounded spirit.

Miss Harwood, from that moment, was associated with all that was soothing and lovely : she stood before him not only as a solace but as a refuge and escape from all the bitterness of London life ; and also as an unexceptionable alliance, welcome to his mother and all his family : and an alliance—so unlike his two former attempts—requiring no painful effort to justify to society at large.

But would Miss Harwood accept him ?—

That the mother would be but too happy at the alliance, he had no doubt at all : but the daughter was the very opposite of the mother. She gave him the impression of purity of mind and sanctity of feelings — as if her affections were sacred, and the shrine of her heart would yield to no golden key. No ; there must be a certain spirit in the worshipper — a spirit in unison with the heart to be won. There was, therefore, just enough uncertainty and difficulty in the case, to add zest to the pursuit. And Walford knew no time must be lost — that the story of his fortune-hunting would one day leak out ; and the least breath of such a rumour with Lucy Harwood would be ruin for ever.

But how could a man of Walford's character ever succeed, if such were the pure sentiments of Lucy Harwood ? — Walford was a man much better than his actions. In his sober hours, when under the wholesome influence of Lucy, his feelings were all that could be desired. There are many men of the same kind, most winning and amiable while they remain their own unbiased and their own proper selves. The world calls them hypocrites, but hypocrites they are not. Their generosity and virtue are as genuine amidst the calms of to-day as their frailty may be unmitigated amidst the temptations of the

morrow. And ladies too lightly leap to fond conclusions. The least expression of sentiment and love casts a warm glow over the character, and is too apt to appear the bright tenor of a life, instead of the mere sunshine that breaks out between the showers.

Every looker-on can tell what must come of this. It is literally “the third time of asking”—Walford is to be married in good earnest this time. Certainly, it seems hard to believe—Ned himself confessed, that after the lady’s being arrested at his first matrimonial attempt, and after being the victim of a pitiless hoax the second time, he felt as if there was a fatality against his marrying at all—till all the dilatory forms of settlements, invitations, cards, silver-laced and knotted into unity, and all the other “pomp and circumstance” of a proper wedding, had been duly performed.

Lady Harwood was one of those mothers who like to strike the iron while it is hot. Until the young people had come to an explanation, and she had made Walford put his intentions into very plain words, during a lengthened interview with herself alone, Lady Harwood kept the affair as quiet as she possibly could. In the course of that interview, Lady Harwood dropped more than one expression which made

Walford start, as if her Ladyship knew those points in his history which he would have deemed it ruin to disclose.

Lady Harwood said, that to trifle with a young lady's affections was a serious thing as regarded her peace of mind, and a cruel injury to her prospects in life—that every woman was hedged about with keen-eyed rivals—as if fenced around with bitter foes. She sincerely hoped that Walford knew his own mind, and was not asking her to consent to a marriage with her daughter while there remained the slightest possibility that the tongue of jealousy or malice could ever make him plead an altered feeling. Young men, she knew, would be young men—no one could make more allowance for youthful indiscretions—of course much had come to her ear—but one half she did not credit, nor of the other half take heed.

Here Walford drew a deep breath. But, Lady Harwood was only alluding to the common gossip of Richcourt, which had ventilated Walford's peccadillos ever since he was a child—College rustication and all.

In this way did this woman of the world make Walford not only declare his passion, but solemnly reiterate that nothing should ever part him from so dear and inestimable a creature.

Having made him commit himself to this statement, her Ladyship proposed that he should that day pay a visit to her solicitor; who, of course, had been duly instructed as to the bargain to be made.

In the fate of man there are two crises, of which certain persons can never skip the minutest detail, though it is an oft-told tale—namely, when a man is hanged, and when a lady is married. Even the sight of white-horsed carriages, and a crowd expectant at a church-door—a bridal dress, or even a cake, if ordered for the morrow—and, above all, the sight of a bridal company on the balcony while the happy couple are starting, with the shoe thrown after them—this is enough to quicken the pulse of youth, and draw sparks from the battery of age.

Nevertheless, tempting as is the theme, we cannot follow all the bridal preparations—still less, all the thrills of hope and fear, by which nature preludes a very revolution in the heart and soul of woman, as she commits herself, motherless and alone, perhaps to go to the world's end, relying on the truth and troth of one frail human being—doomed by his love to replace every worldly tie to the fond, confiding girl—or, it may be, to fling her, stranded and forlorn, on the stage of this rude world;—all

these prizes or blanks in love's lottery we must leave to all serio-sentimental people to compute for themselves, as we have only time to glance at them.

Yet there was one striking incident that we must stop to mention :—

That Lady Harwood should have monopolised the one great catch of the whole county to herself—that she should have carried the policy of annexation as far as the estate of Richcourt Manor, this was mortifying to the pride and vexing to the spirit of all the ladies far and near.

It was doubly mortifying, because it was only proving to conviction what Cheston and his friends were always hinting—that Lady Harwood was so truly irresistible, that her diplomacy was worthy of a world-wide sphere; and that in this life's race—be it of what kind soever—Lady Harwood must ever be first, and the rest nowhere. Annoyed as they were, their jealousy broke out in no active form: still, the triumphant mother could hardly believe her lady-friends would strike flag without a solitary shot, or without some secret *ruse* to rob her of her prize. So she could hardly endure Walford out of her sight. She was in a fever of excitement for fear “some ill-natured person” should poison his

mind against the alliance. Also, she was always on the alert, “expecting nothing less” than that some such an attempt should be made to prejudice herself against him.

There is one more way of knowing things than is dreamt of in the philosophy of common mortals. There is a certain feeling and intuition —there is a secret apprehension, we know not how or why—which we often recall to mind as a voiceless prophecy after any serious event has come to pass.

Some such a cloud was brooding over the mind of Lady Harwood, feeling very like the forerunner of some storm to ruffle the smooth tenor of her fortunes, when one morning she received a letter, written in a strange hand, and a very characteristic and bold hand, too.

The writer was Hannah Hengen: the letter, perhaps, was written in the third person, to avoid the difficulty of calling herself either Mrs. Edward Walford or plain Hannah Hengen. It purported to warn her Ladyship of the real character of the man to whom she was about to entrust her only child. It enlarged on his being false and faithless, and said there was reason to believe that Mr. Walford’s rustication, and even the name of the reputed barmaid at Woodstock, were too well known at Richcourt for her Ladyship

to have forgotten the name of Alice Hengen—that it was that unhappy lady's sister that now addressed her, and warned her not to consent to give her daughter to one whose troth had been plighted, and that not once alone.

Lady Harwood was not the kind of mother to be influenced by a letter like this; still, it left an unpleasant impression. She well knew, that if the letter had met her daughter's eye the consequences would have been serious. The daughter would not have rested till she had followed up the clue, and had learnt the length and breadth of the pledges said to have been given by her intended husband.

Such investigations into the private history of young men, Lady Harwood knew, were but too apt to break the spell of the enchanter, and to scatter all sentimentality to the winds. So she framed just such a reply as she thought most likely to prevent the same person from troubling her with another letter. She hinted very plainly, though the words were equivocal, that the real nature of Mr. Walford's "plighted troth," as also the character of certain other persons, were matters well known to her. She knew also the misery such persons brought on private families, and thought that the least such characters could do, in seasons like the present, was to stand aloof,

and not to interfere with things as honourable and as sacred as lawful wedlock.

This letter remained unanswered; but how far it was forgotten, or indeed unacceptable to the woman who called it forth, will appear in another part of our story.

CHAPTER XIX

TOO SMOOTH TO LAST.

THE married life of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Walford, now settled at Richcourt Hall, began very happily ; for, Walford was a man who meant well. He was constitutionally amiable ; he was sufficiently in tune and harmony to respond to the soft tones and sympathies of a tender, a loving, and a devoted wife.

Whether we are all born alike may be a question.—Whether we all start fair from the first moment of our lives, or whether some of us come weighted into this world, and, whether, on some mysterious principle of compensation, it is ordained that, only to save their distance in the race, shall for some be deemed as good as the winning-post for others—this, we say, is an open question : but of one thing there is no doubt ;—

very soon after we have kicked and squalled, and in other ways vindicated the free use of our limbs and other powers, a wonderful difference begins between us—as great as between the colt running wild in the farmer's yard, and one that is nursed and crammed in training-stables.

Walford's better qualities had early advantages of the latter kind. There had been very little to cross his temper or sour his youthful character: his virtues, or amiabilities, or what, without being too philosophical, commonly passes for such, were still in a fair state of preservation; and though we very well know, that he had done things of which his conscience disapproved, still the more startling parts of these dark doings were early shifted out of his sight—just as we have seen, that whether his own offspring was among the City Arabs, or an innocent girl made a wreck for life, all had been so managed by Tom Snipe or the solicitor, that Walford's conscience could only half reprove for what he was only half allowed to see, in all its deepest dye and blackest colours.

Walford, therefore, lived on all the better terms with his wife, because on the best of terms with himself. His wife's one object in this life was to make him happy, and he submitted to his fate with a great deal of resignation.

Lady Harwood said he might be warranted safe with a snaffle-bridle, though she did remind Lucy that we should never begin faster than we can hold on, and that a woman should always keep a little in reserve, and never let a man know the full depth of all the love she bears him.

In this way all went on so smoothly and quietly, that the whole neighbourhood was disappointed. They began to call the young couple rather tame. The reason was, that they missed the scandal—or, at least, the talk—that Richcourt had so long supplied. “The goose of a mother, who was everlastingly worrying herself and all around her about her silly boy,” and the folly of the son “who was already the prey of sharpers, and the mark of money-hunting mammas,” had been standing topics in Richcourt society—topics on a level with the capacity, and in the very key of the feelings of half the country round. But, now “all was hushed.” “Why are good children and their little stories always so stupid, mamma?” asked a little child. Children of an older growth began to think the same.

Even as regards the happy couple themselves, this unruffled happiness we could hardly wish to last. Storms—even storms domestic

—may be good to clear the social atmosphere. We want troubles to wind the heart-strings up to concert pitch, and an occasional ruffling to prevent dull stagnation.

But, whoever in this world is in want of a trouble, has a want that can never be long un-supplied. One morning, after the usual post-hour, Lucy found her husband quite an altered man. He spoke as one absent—with forced, hollow tones, his thoughts far away. He looked not angry — not passionate — vexed — annoyed ; — no one of these terms would at all describe his case. He looked strange and scared—the muscles of his face twitching painfully : Walford had received a shock.

“ What can be the matter ?—dearest, don’t look so strange ! No news can be so very bad ! — You don’t speak !—stay, let me read the bad news then,” she said, eagerly extending her hand across the table to reach the letter. But he quickly—quite convulsively—laid his hand upon the letter itself, the envelope only being within Lucy’s reach — an envelope with its direction written in a lady’s hand.

Every request for explanation was met with the words, “ Impossible !”—“ Don’t, dearest !—pray, I entreat you, never ask me !” or with some such refusal, mixed with those terms of

endearment which bespeak the distress of the inmost soul.

It was now poor Lucy's turn to receive a shock : there was something so ominous in the fact that a few passes from a female hand could scatter the forces of her husband's brain, and send a shot to the very citadel of the heart. "And why would he not show the letter, when all the fond wife wanted was to explain away its terrors — to comfort and console him?"

What made things worse was, that till that moment her husband had always been so open and so confiding. Walford was quite that kind of confiding character which would gladly have all his thinking and resolves done by proxy, and settle all his opinions on his wife. But now, all was changed as by some cruel enchanter's spell. The disturbed and frightened couple at length moved to the breakfast-room, and Lucy went hurriedly and abstractedly about the tea — (if a woman were to die next hour she would still make tea) — but not a morsel could Walford touch. No sooner was he seated than he snatched at his watch — paced the room — ordered his dog-cart, exclaiming — "I must leave by the first train for London." Lucy begged to go, too. "No — no — impossible! — not for

worlds!—for mercy's sake ask no questions, or you'll drive me distracted—mad!"

* * * *

Alas, poor Lucy! You are now left all forlorn—your imagination filling up all the wide gaps in this mysterious history with the hideous phantoms of a distempered mind—while jealousy, indignation, and hot resentments as against some unknown spoiler of connubial bliss, are fevering the heart, so long a stranger to all such bitter feelings!

Walford had promised to write at the earliest moment—that is to say, Lucy had, in many beseeching, earnest words, administered a promise as they do an oath, and he had sealed it with a kiss as he tore himself away. Still, five days passed—five several times was the servant ordered to lose no time about the letters, and five several times did he come galloping up with the mail-bag, as if in a case of life and death—five times before a letter from her husband, of any kind, met her eye;—a suspense awfully painful, so sensibly did Lucy feel he was just in that distracted state in which desperate deeds are apt to come to pass.

At length came a letter, of which the plain sense was one thing, though the reserved and equivocal expressions spoke another—a letter

which looked fair to the eye, but felt false to the heart of her who read it. Among other terms, she read that "all was settled"—"the purport of his journey was accomplished ;" but, as she loved him, he warned her never to enter upon the subject more.

Next day Walford returned. Lucy was impatient to read him with her eyes : for, she was clever as women always are to decipher the hieroglyphics sorrow-graven on the brow of one she loved. She found him tranquil and composed, but by no means the man he had been. He was cautious and uncommunicative, and had learnt a sharp and repulsive manner, by which he resented any attempt—and of which he was always suspicious — of touching on the one forbidden subject.

From that hour Walford was evidently as a man who had realised some great trouble. By degrees a habit of endurance had set in, and time had its usual effect in mellowing the sorrow, and in making him comparatively resigned to his burden : but the burden still was there—the light heart and buoyant spirit were no more. He was aged. The sorrows of years had been crowded into days.

From that time, the history of Mr. and Mrs. Walford would be the history of the deceitful-

ness of worldly things—of things that seem, but are not, blessings. There stood, deeply embosomed amongst fine timber and picturesque scenery, Richcourt Hall; envied by many a passer-by, who thought, no doubt, “Oh! what a happy man is Walford!” But two lines of Horace were ever on this envied landlord’s lips —lines to be rendered thus:—

“ What boots the proud domain, the stores of art,
If one deep grief is gnawing at the heart ?”

All that confiding affection so charming to a wife seemed suddenly scattered to the winds. What could more speedily break the spell of sentiment than this glaring proof that her husband could not, or would not, trust her? Lucy from time to time, in her bursts of feeling, threw out solemn protestations that “if sacrifice were required there was none she would not make. She would go with him to penury or to death, if he would but speak—if he would but trust her.”

What woman cares for the mere joint empire of a heart?—to be almost trusted is no trust at all. And what is more tantalising than a secret—especially when connected with some mysterious female hand, with such power to wound—more mighty far than the wife, and yet

that wife forbidden, with the sharpest and most angry prohibition, even to allude to the fell enchantress—this weird sister—this avenging fiend ! Why, Lucy Walford's was the case of Mrs. Bluebeard ; she was permitted to look into every closet, every corner of his soul, but one alone.

We are now advancing in the chronology of our history. Year after year is going on, but the state of feeling we have described will serve for all years alike. Three children have been born — each in its turn diverting the dark current of the mother's thoughts : but as to the father, Lucy could not but feel that, with all his depth of paternal feeling, every birth was a season of depression. As he pressed the infant to his breast and smothered it with kisses, he did so convulsively, turning away his face from her ; still, in the mirror she could see that his eyes were filled with tears.

But did no member of his family remark the change in Walford ? His own mother died the first year of his marriage. Still, there was Lucy's mother — surely, Lady Harwood was not the person to see her daughter miserable and not to interfere ?

Lady Harwood acted truly like herself—she said at once, the affair was clear as daylight.

"Poor fellow! Well, he has purer and more decent feelings than some men have—that is all the difference. Lucy, to be sure, is innocent as a babe—far more ignorant of the world than I was at her age. But, bless me! I had seen and heard enough to make me doubt the morality of every man alive. But—but—I'll speak to him."

Whereupon Lady Harwood, nothing doubting that she knew the length and breadth of all Walford's misery to a hair, felt a certain inward gratulation at the thought that she was going to relieve him of the incubus—to bid defiance to the female foe—to say, "the secret is known—the wife is reconciled to the thought of some youthful indiscretion of his bachelor's days—so now your wretched threats avail not, and your power is gone for ever!" Whereupon one morning she took Walford by the arm, in her most winning and overpowering way—called him "a dear, good fellow—the essence of soft-heartedness," but "a little—just the least bit—too soft in the head." She then proceeded to say she must have a little confidential talk—all for his good—in the study, with him alone.

Walford knew what was coming. But, if he could look resolute, Lady Harwood could be more resolute still. Physical force was out of

the question, and as to any other powers, commanding force of character and mind, you might as well pit Romeo against Lady Macbeth.

Lady Harwood began very sympathetically, by saying that "she was really unhappy at observing that Walford was less light-hearted than he used to be. His goodness to her Lucy was beyond all praise, and deserved all that they both could do — and more, too — to make him blithe and merry as the day was long.

"—As to the case in point, in one word, the secret was out: that horrid woman—that fiend in female form—who had been paling the cheek of her dear Edward and chilling the very heart within him — she knew it all."

Walford started—he clapped his hand to his brow in an agony of horror—supposing for the moment that the tremendous secret was out at last. Indeed, he lived in daily terror of a discovery worse than death to him.

"Now be composed, Edward; when once known, the peccadillo—one so manifestly outgrown, and not pertaining to the present state of things—the peccadillo is no more. Yes—true,"—she said, laughing as at a bright idea—"let me be your *Mother-Confessor*, and plenary absolution is yours for a kiss. Confession, did I say?—no literal confession is required. I have

already told dear Lucy what it is ; and her only reply was, ‘I told him I could endure anything, if only trusted : let him assure you it’s no more, and be happy.’ An allegory, therefore — a parallel case, I may say—shall convey my meaning — one word—one look of assent is all we ask.

“A young friend of mine having married a good, innocent-minded girl—the very counterpart of my Lucy—one who he believed was, and ever had lived, pure and spotless as the driven snow—a very Vestal in her imagination—he suffered for months under a system of threats and extortion from a certain lady, who pretended that his troth was pledged and plighted eternally to her — ”

Walford breathed heavily, feeling that, however strangely the mother could make light of it, his misery was known at last.

“—But, happily, just then I came sidling on to the stage. I partly gleaned and partly guessed the secret ; and the result was, a definite appointment for the formidable lady to present herself bodily at the house—when he led her at once into the presence of his wife, and told her to say her very worst. Of course I had prepared and primed the wife for the occasion, and she did give her ‘such a dressing !’ To one of my spirit, you may be sure, it was indeed a treat to

stand and hear it, with (for I could not help it) just one or two little comments on my own account. Now, my dear Edward, Lucy having dropped a little of the childish credulity in man's perfectibility she used to have—Lucy is quite prepared to do the same. She has a *spirit* when once roused—she would not be my child if she had not—quite equal to the occasion: so, speak the word and it shall be done."

Walford breathed more freely at finding by the concluding words that the trying moment of discovery had not come yet. Still, all his powers were required to throw off Lady Harwood, with her winning ways and resistless energy combined, melting him in the first place, and ready to overpower him afterwards.

He remained silent till she bid him speak.

He looked like one stupefied, or almost in a trance—the body was sympathising with the agonies of the mind. He rose slowly to leave the room. Lady Harwood clung to him, and said, "No—he must not—he should not go before he had made a clean breast of all that perilous stuff that weighed upon the heart."

He said nothing, but looked with a half-glazed eye of quiet remonstrance—not struggling, but steadily bearing his inert weight in the direction of the door. At length, as she perse-

vered, his countenance began to change, and there was that in his look which frightened her : it was not anger—not natural temper, she had provoked. She felt she was contending with a mind and a nature wrenched and wrested—she felt it unsafe to persevere ; and, as he hurried away, and was seen pacing up and down his well-known walk when more than usually distracted, in the darkest part of the shrubberies, she reflected, in the spirit of King Lear, “ This way to madness leads.” She felt, therefore, she never could enter on the subject again ; and the only result of the interview was to make the mother as unhappy almost as the daughter could be. She now conceived a fearful sense of their position—as if they were struggling in the toils of a dread necessity, and must await the decrees of a resistless and inexorable fate.

In this way three or four more years passed away ; not, indeed, with the dull monotony of one and the same dark cloud ever wrapping in mysterious horror the fortunes of Richcourt Hall. Certainly there were seasons of sadness, which might be represented by some such gloomy colouring ; but daily life brings too many troubles to admit of the unbroken sovereignty of any one tyrant woe. Walford’s clouds of mental depression, it was observed, gathered and dispersed

at certain seasons. Lucy's faculties, by this time sorrow-sharpened, had learnt to recognise, as regarded her husband, a certain periodicity, as it were "the law of storms," and the signs of those recurring tempests which almost whirled his reason from its throne. The troubles would sometimes appear of a pecuniary kind, because Walford was always restless about quarter-day.

Just then, Walford's nervous anxiety about the letter-bag was sometimes painful in the extreme, and Lucy could see him throw out letter after letter on the table, with scarcely a glance, when suddenly he would light upon one which, with affected calmness, he would place by his side; but always, however accidental it appeared, the direction was hidden from her; and in a few minutes, as if for some other purpose, he would disappear with that dreadful letter from the room, and perhaps not return to finish his breakfast; and Lucy would observe to her mother, with a sigh, that another of her Edward's fits of sadness had now set in for many days.

There was one of these occasions, when Lucy and her eldest daughter, now old enough to share the confidence as well as the sorrows of her mother, would have greeted any little incident and chance of diversion—even a misfortune of another kind—as a virtual blessing. Just then

the neighbourhood, which had been alarmed with reports of several burglaries of a very daring description, was now quite up in arms to discover the perpetrators of one which, after a manful resistance on the part of the master of the house, had resulted in murder; and Walford was speedily called on to concert with his brother-magistrates the line of operations.

The story must be told in another chapter.

CHAPTER XX.

HOW THE DRAGONS' TEETH PRODUCE ARMED
MEN.

As a real friend is a scarce commodity, we sometimes find one in the least likely places—we speak of that kind of friend that is “closer than a brother.” Friendship of this kind depends on certain secret congruities of nature—on those niceties of feeling and those winning influences of a good, genial soul, which you may find in the yeoman as often as in the squire of the parish.

“Thomas Mason, and Mary his wife,”—(the very words of their tombstone)—were persons of this kind; Walford’s tenants at Rayleigh farm. People said, Dame Nature was in the best of humours when making either of them. She threw them, doubtless, as a dash of goodness to qualify the sour or the bitters in that

strange mixture, the society of the nineteenth century. As to Mrs. Mason, she was a tender-hearted, motherly sort of woman; with that degree of natural refinement which would have made her pass for a country *squireess* in the last century. Her husband, old Gaffer Mason,—as Ned and Nat Walford had always called him,—was a remarkably shrewd, observing man; and being about sixty-five years old, and very fresh and gay for his age, his long experience and sterling worth caused him to be consulted on all matters, rural or parochial, by the gentlemen around. No two people walked into Richcourt Church, morning and afternoon, on the Sunday, with more deference, whether from the hobnailed lads idling to the last moment about the tombstones or the porch, or from the parson and the gentry, than did Farmer Mason and his wife.

But what more nearly concerns our story is, that the Masons felt identified with the fortunes of the Walford family, with all the fealty of olden time. They killed an ox and gave it away, with strong beer brewed for the occasion, at Walford's marriage. They broached some of the same at each christening; they put on mourning, and headed the long procession to the grave, when the good lady of Richcourt Hall was no more. That good lady had not thought it derogatory

to consult Mrs. Mason about her Ned's College troubles, and later dangers ; for there was something so inviting to confidence in her—there was a sympathy in the look, and a yearning in the manner, which “ seemed to offer her bosom to the unfortunate to nestle there.” And as to old Gaffer, there was a frankness in his nature which let you at once into his soul, and made you intimate with all his thoughts.

There was reason to think that Mrs. Walford, when she found the sand of life would soon run out, had most solemnly committed her son Edward to their advice and guidance. She knew their influence, and believed, and rightly too, that her Edward was a man to bear from one of low degree more plain-speaking than his richer neighbours would care to venture.

This being the character of the Masons, Lucy and her mother had both observed, that in the seasons of Walford's distractions the only persons he would endure to visit or to talk with were the Masons. The first time they arrived at that conclusion was once after it had been announced that a strange lawyer-looking man had come from London on important business, and could not leave till he had seen Mr. Walford. Walford, after being closeted with this mysterious visitor for half-an-hour, came forth from the study with

that peculiar pallor and trance-like cast of countenance that was always so alarming to the terrified Lucy, and rushing out of the house, as if in a mood to destroy himself, it was a relief indeed to trace him to Rayleigh farm.

Little more was wanting to convince both the mother and the daughter that the Masons knew far more about the secret of Walford's depression than any one else. It was quite true that old Gaffer Mason had collected so much, by putting one little fact and another together, that Walford found it the least of two evils to tell him all; and from that time Rayleigh farm was the land of heart's-ease to Walford. He could at least find vent for his pent-up griefs. He could put his sorrow into words, and look the enemy full and fairly in the face.

Add to this, while Mrs. Mason would quote many a household truth and solemn text, that in such and such an hour of woe had lightened the burden at her heart — old Gaffer would rack his fertile brain for chances and possibilities of escape. So, while the wife taught patience for the present, the husband let in daylight on the future. "Indeed," said he, "there is no knowing in a case like this what time may do for a man," and bade him "have a good heart," and battle with his trouble to the latest moment. The old

man often added, that life-long experience had taught him, that however black the clouds which gathered above the head of man, the storm never fell, if it fell just there at all, with all the unbroken violence which the sinking heart had shadowed forth.—Walford has acknowledged since, that but for Gaffer and Mary Mason there were times when he must undoubtedly have gone stark mad.

Such true, though humble friends, were Gaffer and Mrs. Mason; at this time hale and hearty, and seemingly as good lives as any of their age: besides which, as to length of days, there is an instinctive though a most delusive feeling, that in the scheme of Providence some persons are too useful to be removed just yet—as if even God Almighty could not do without them. No, no; such a rent in nature the fond heart tells us, or, rather, makes us take for granted, full surely will not be; and Gaffer Mason and his wife at this time seemed in Richcourt village like some of the Shepherd kings and queens, reigning by that only right divine, the power of righteous dealing over their fellow-creatures' hearts.—So, if any one had hinted the possibility of a change to Richcourt folk, they would have felt it was too great a gap for Providence ever to let it be; and as to

Walford, the Masons had become the very refuge and the stronghold of his scared and scattered feelings—a necessary part and parcel of his very existence,—when the following calamity spread horror and indignation over all that part of the county of Berks.

The London police, "from information received," had reason to suspect that a gang of thieves, with Teddy the Tiler at their head, had left town upon a marauding expedition in the country. Teddy the Tiler was so called from his dexterity in entering houses by the roof, when no other opening was safely available. He was a desperate fellow—known to every London gaoler as one who had passed as many of his evil days in prison as out.

Teddy's gang was first heard of at Windsor, in the neighbourhood of which they committed three daring burglaries. But soon bars, bolts, and watchdogs, becoming the order of the day among the terrified inhabitants, the police of Reading received notice to be on the alert, as Teddy's "Peep-o'-day Boys" might soon turn up there.

Teddy must have known less of his peculiar line of operations than the world gave him credit for, if he had not a far-and-wide correspondence with tramps and "travellers;" that is, with

petty thieves, who go the circuit of markets and fairs—as also with local authorities of the baser sort—all engaged, for a consideration, to give him notice of any house worth sacking.

From one of these allies he learnt that Squire Walford held an audit on a certain day, and that the rich Farmer Mason just about that time would have no small sum of ready money in his house, besides his much-admired old silver tankards and tea-pot—long time in the Mason family: and, to crown all, the massy presentation-cup, which testified to his worth and wisdom at a certain grand agricultural gathering.

Teddy laid his plans accordingly: and, ere long, one night Farmer Mason was awakened by noises unaccountable below-stairs—noises which his wife was equally at a loss to explain. While pondering what to do, soft steps were heard on the stairs, and Mason sprang out of bed to defend himself; when, by the time he had reached a heavy constable's staff of lignum vitae, three men had entered the room. Mason rushed boldly at them, knocked down one, senseless, on the floor, and was struggling with the other two; when the wife threw herself into the fray, clinging to the robbers with imploring words—backed by the best of her feeble efforts

—“to take their all, but spare her husband’s life.” In less than a minute the husband was laid, all but lifeless, by a heavy blow from a crowbar; and the good wife was shaken so roughly off, that she fell, stunned and seriously injured, on to the floor. The robbers had then too much to do in helping away their wounded confederate to spend any time in rifling the house, but beat a precipitate retreat. Two servants slept in the house—a man and a woman.

The man, alarmed as soon as his master, rushed out of his bedroom window to procure assistance, but fell into the hands of two of the gang, stationed outside for this very purpose; while the woman, silenced by a threat of instant death, remained motionless in her room. At daybreak Walford was roused from his slumbers with the stunning intelligence that Rayleigh farm had been robbed, and Mr. and Mrs. Mason murdered in their beds—and both their throats cut from ear to ear.

Walford reached the house in time to find his worthy old friend breathing his last, never having recovered consciousness. The wife was suffering from concussion; and the surgeon said time alone would show the extent of the injury sustained.

After some days, the poor woman awoke to a consciousness of having lost the only soul she cared to live for. Her evidence was then taken ; which she concluded with a hope that mercy would be shown those wicked men, and time to repent of their evil deeds. She added, as to her husband's death, "They did not come for to do it. I begged him to give up the money ; but he was always a wilful man. If he had listened to me, we should neither of us have been hurt."

The whole county of Berks was now up in arms. At every market and fair the tale was told ; and the love of self-importance, quite as much as love of justice, sharpened the wits of every one to collect any evidence that could possibly bear upon the case. Before long, the landlady of a small public-house thought that there was a strong resemblance between the broken head of a customer and the blow dealt by the brave Farmer Mason ; so, she gave information, which soon delivered up Teddy the Tiler and another of the gang to the hands of justice.

A good chain of evidence was soon completed. Walford, breathing fire and slaughter, was untiring in the pursuit — vowing that vengeance should overtake the murderers of his best friends ; and at the next assizes held at Reading both culprits were condemned to die.

CHAPTER XXI.

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE BROOD THAT SPRINGS
FROM DRAGONS' TEETH.

BUT what has become of our old friend John Hackles, and his affectionate sister, whom we left at Oxford, in the court yclept "the Pig Market," near the Examination Hall, and have seen but once since, with Rickworth, on the Sunday?

Every object attained in this life becomes at once a stepping-stone to something else: "man never is, but always to be, blessed." The point of supreme felicity is ever shifting to gentlemen as well as ladies—at least until after they are married; after which, they either make happiness a little less ecstatic serve their purpose, or else they renounce their faith in this life's happiness altogether.

John, first of all, realised his vision of a quiet

independence for himself, and saving his sister from some house of bondage, whether for stitching or for teaching, by his own honest industry and wear and tear of brain and nerve-power. Then they both were very comfortable at first, and both were rather restless afterwards. John approved of a Colonial College-tutor's offer for his sister, and very soon after he filled up her place with the lady of his love, and forthwith settled down as unsettled as other persons, the necessaries of life accruing from College tuition first, and legal practice afterwards.

At the eventful moment of which we are speaking, the name of Mr. Hackles was doomed to appear as the solicitor for the prosecution.

Let us hear how he discharged that office.

John Hackles was not a man of any maudlin sentiment. No man called roguery or lying, however disguised in forms conventional, whether as perquisites or privileges, by plainer or more uncomplimentary names. Still, John was a man who made allowance for almost everybody. The way he would parry Mrs. Hackles' thrusts at her maid, that lady often complained, was most provoking. "Don't be hard upon them, my dear ; for, born in a hovel, pigging all in one room — delicacy or even decency impossible—beset by beldams, while ladies are guarded by cha-

perones—the wonder is that the poor creatures are not a great deal worse.”—This will serve as a sample of John’s considerateness.

“Now then, John,” said his wife, with a little playful irony, “you have some nice characters for your charitable interpretation. I should not be at all surprised if you were full of excuses and palliations for the murderers at Rayleigh farm.”

“The murder was accidental—all the men intended was to rob: no pistol was fired, or deadly weapon provided—the aged Masons lost their lives in a scuffle.”

“Poor Teddy the Tiler! I thought he would be one of your pets.”

“One would almost suppose you knew the sad history which, partly from the gaoler and partly from himself, I learnt to-day.”

The lady became serious, and sympathetic too. Her curiosity was now strongly excited, and John proceeded to put together the unconnected facts elicited from the leader of the gang, nearly in his own words. Instead of the cant expressions of thieves, presuming the reader has no desire to become learned in such language, we prefer to give equivalent terms in common use.

“It is kind of you, Sir, to come to comfort us; but, as to ‘seeing the enormity of our

crime,' as you exhort us, you must know as well as we do that the robbery was all we intended. As to killing the old couple, no one can be more sorry for it than we are ; but it was quite an accident, while fighting in defence of our own lives.

" As to the robbery, this has always been my line — the only trade I ever knew, and the only trade that those about me, from my earliest recollection, ever practised. You ask if I was ever at school ? Well, I was the best scholar in Brixton (gaol), and within one or two of the best at Guildford and at Pentonville. You seem surprised to hear me talk of gaols. Almost my earliest recollections are of gaols, and I have lived out and in ever since. For all I know, I was born in gaol. In gaol I used to sleep in something like a proper bed ; at other times I did not always even sleep in a house, and on the floor, but under the trees in the Parks, or door-steps, and thence removed to the Station-house ; or under arches, or hayricks and out-houses, if 'travelling.'

" Whether I was ever baptized, I can't say ; but I never saw anything of that sort in Brixton or other chapels. The only regular places of worship I have ever been in was not for what I could learn, but only for what I could

get there ; and a church is the likeliest as well as the safest place of any, especially for a rich prize from small tradesmen's wives — many of them carry all their shop-money in their pockets, on a Sunday evening, for fear they should find the house robbed when they go home.

" I have practised every line (of thieving) by turns. I was first taught to pick pockets — regularly trained to do it "as should be," by a man of Clerkenwell I met in Guildford gaol. After that, I could help myself from shops — steal the till, or break windows for jewellery. I then attended races, and dressed well enough to mix at the Horticultural ; out of season, I have been the round of all the country fairs. But when once I took to robbing houses I did not care so much for the small chances.

" Far from meaning to kill any one, Teddy the Tiler knows his business much too well — as every London officer could tell you. Why, we should be ashamed of such a thing, as spoiling our game, and setting all the country up in arms against us.

" As to father and mother, I scarcely remember mine ; and from what I have observed, I never saw the good of them. Where the father's a thief the children are sent out to thieve, too, for him to live on their earnings, and get drunk,

and serve them cruelly. And as to any home for such as me, the gaol was most like my home ; and instead of playing with tops and marbles, our games were hustling and picking pockets. One favourite game was Judge and Jury ; and always about execution time all the boys played at sentencing to death — hanging — dying game, and all that.”

Such was the tenor of this outcast’s story. His account of his different punishments bordered on the ridiculous. He had been committed for sleeping in the street : he might as well have been committed for being in the world at all. He had been committed for being without the necessaries of life, and he had been committed for helping himself to some. He had been committed for having no visible occupation, when every one took care not to give him any ! And now his lying stunned on the ground, while another killed a man by chance-medley, was tortured into a case of murder ! If his was not bad luck, mortal man never yet was born to any. A robber he was, if there was any sin in that ; but as to being called on to repent of a murder, he never had the heart to do one. There were no such cold-blooded murders as were likely to be done by the law — and none so senseless, either ; for they would never stop

burglaries by hanging men for accidents while committing them.

Huckles naturally became deeply interested in the fate of this poor fellow, so manifestly born, educated, and ripened in sin. He was a man with some little reading and information, acute in intellect, and of a nature that seemed to loathe the thoughts of murder. He even spoke of Mr. Mason as a fine old fellow, and but that he was bent on pinioning the arms without violence, he never should have laid himself open to that stunning blow which alone put it out of his power to prevent further mischief.

Huckles could not but help feeling that the robber's soul was once as a fair tablet on which good impressions, as easily as evil ones, might, by seasonable instruction, have been indelibly made. Still, the excitement in the county was so great, that Hackles saw no hopes of saving Teddy's life; though Hackles, growing sanguine as he grew interested in the fate of the criminal, had some hopes in the success of a petition, if proceeding from Walford, as "the active and energetic magistrate"—for so Walford was described in every newspaper, with the credit of having brought "the murderers of the Masons" to condign punishment. Hackles thought that Walford's voice would be listened to on the side

of mercy, more especially as there seemed reason in the plea that one victim—the man who dealt the fatal blow—might well satisfy offended justice. But, Walford at that time would not hear of it. The loss of the Masons no one alive felt as acutely as he did, and Walford had been reared in no school very favourable to that feature of the Christian character which made Hackles identify himself with the feelings and the failings of all sorts and conditions of men.

Time went on—fifteen days from the sentence to the execution alone were allowed ; and Hackles became daily more deeply interested in Teddy's doom.

One night Hackles rose from a sleepless bed to pen a most earnest and beseeching letter, and sent it to reach Walford by day-break. Though time was short, Hackles, in the torrent of his excited feelings, hoped he yet could sweep all obstacles away : but a whole day passed without a reply. Hackles was strung up to a pitch of agony. The morrow dawned, and yet no reply—though by the evening of that day all hope would be gone. Still, facts which more and more should plead for mercy—facts most startling, so that Hackles was almost overpowered from agitation, as one by one he drew them forth—had by this time reached his ear. There

were facts, too, of stirring cogency, as affecting, above all living men, Walford himself, who little dreamed of the very thunder-clap that soon would reach his ears.

The third day Walford called, no longer saying that he objected, but with many a reason how and why no intercession could possibly have availed.

Huckles was now bitterly indignant. Argue as Walford would, nothing could persuade Hackles that anything else than want of thought and energy alone had allowed such reasons to prevail. Then said Hackles,—“I fear, he dies to-morrow!”

“No doubt he does. The petition from two or three Quakers, of which I suppose you have heard, have had the usual stereotyped reply.”

“Then that, indeed, does seal his doom! But—but—Walford, tell me this—You did not sign, or by your powerful influence support, this petty petition?—Answer me that!”

As Hackles said this, the storm was gathering: his brain was as a battery charged. Walford was scared and startled at his altered look as he answered,—

“No!”

“Then, his blood be on your own head! THAT FELON IS YOUR OWN SON—born in nature’s wedlock. He is as like you as he can stare—the

same—the very same! You drank his health at a certain Newnham party. The same whom Rickworth showed you in the gutter—an orphan when his erring mother had just been carried to a pauper's grave—hoping you would act a father's part, and rescue him from his otherwise certain doom, of prowling through life among our City Arabs ——”

“ Impossible!—he is not the same!—what possible reason can there be to say so? I did—I paid—I mean, I did all that was usual in such a case ——”

“ Usual! ah, usual!—Alas! sin is most usual in all its shapes: but witness the result—no doubt, most usual too. But, truth will out—in works, if not in words—speaking in the whirlwind, if not in ‘the still small voice.’ I maintain, that felon is your true-born son, flung upon the world without a parent’s care.—Had it not been so, your good old friends the Masons had been living now.—His identity is beyond all doubt. ‘Mother Powell,’ he said, ‘told him he was a gentleman’s son;’ and, in spite of many an *alias*, his name is—RAPHAEL WALFORD!”

As soon as John Hackles was closeted with his wife, and had recovered his composure, his reflections were as follows:—

"More and more do I daily realise the truth, 'God is not mocked,'—there is no cheating Providence; 'for, whatsoever a man soweth'—sooner or later, in one form or in another—'that shall he also reap.' Things are wonderfully balanced—there is a marvellous principle of Compensation in the economy of this world: sin and shame will go together. Flattery may hush the still small voice, but Truth will come home to us in the whirlwind and the storm of heaped-up ruin. Witness the murder of Rayleigh farm—witness the cruel kindness that sheltered Ned Walford throughout life from the faintest breath of that timely warning which, to a needy man like me, speaks in terms most bitter, but most wholesome—terms that make every slip a virtual lesson in practical wisdom.

"However, Walford has heard the truth at last. God grant it may not be all too late to profit him. He has been fawned upon and fooled from the very cradle; but now the crop of *Dragons' Teeth*, as Mr. Walesby used to say, has had time to grow, and show itself in rank and hideous forms.—Yes, for years I had observed him. Poor fellow! I see too plainly 'the whole heart is sick'—the lyre is out of tune—there is the very spirit of unrest—some vulture sorrow is preying upon his vitals: and knowing, as I

do, that Ned had more than common interest in that worthy old couple, now no more, I am almost afraid to think of the consequences of the discovery I have so ruthlessly laid before him.”

There was much truth, as it will soon appear, in the remarks of John Hackles—and no little reason for his apprehensions. Walford’s trials begin now to culminate. Lucy felt most acutely the blow that fell upon her worthy neighbours; and the first reflection which broke upon her mind was,—“Then there is no more comfort or counsel—no more heart’s-ease for my dear Edward—no longer the friendly chat at Rayleigh farm to divert his mind in those mysterious sorrows!—Oh! dear, what will he do?”

The cup of this good woman’s bitterness was not full yet.

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW THINGS MUST BE WORSE BEFORE THEY ARE
BETTER.

WEEKS and months run on not quite as quickly as the pen which would record their flight. We must take credit for that lapse of time, so hard to represent on paper—time sufficient for the natural progress of events as critical as those of which we sometimes feel that the bitters of a life are pressed into an hour — those fearful and soul-stirring hours, which are measured more by the throbbing of the heart than the ticking of the clock.

* * * *

“ What can this possibly mean, dear Edward? You know how odious that Mr. Snipe has always been to me; and you yourself, I always thought, liked him no better. Yet, visit after visit he has paid—much, I am sure, to your

disturbance ; and now you have actually asked him to dinner ! ”

“ My dearest Lucy, it is sometimes difficult — you know we should be careful not to offend people — really, you must give me credit for good intentions.”

Walford might have said that Snipe had virtually invited himself ; and that he was too much at his mercy to dare to receive the proposal otherwise than with a good grace.

Things were gradually growing more and more painful to the lady of Richcourt Hall. The appearance of Snipe upon the stage — now coming with a friend, to the great disgust of the keepers, and shooting over the manor, on which Snipe actually led the way into those covers which the keepers had been ordered not on any account to disturb ! — this strange visit, added to the spiritless conduct of Walford, made Lucy question whether her husband were not positively living there on sufferance, and whether one acre of the estate could now be called his own !

Ere long these visits were followed by visits of another kind. A tall, ladylike person, of rigid brow and lips compressed — in mien and manner most commanding — called, and was admitted, too. If Snipe’s visits always caused

Walford to betray the contortions of his soul within by sudden pallor and signs of nervousness, this lady-visitor was evidently more appalling still: Walford started at her name—rushed suddenly out to meet her—was closeted with her alone, and accompanied her from the house, as if to cut off all communications with other persons; nor left her till she had passed beyond the further gate.

From the date of the first of these visits Walford was utterly unmanned. He could neither eat nor drink, as if he knew the food he tasted: and as to sleep—all rest was gone. He would pace for hours up and down his terrace-walks, with that untiring step which nature prompts, simply to counteract the irritation of the brain.

If one or two characters appear to have dropped from our story, and kind inquiry is made after Brother Nat, we have simply to say, that Lucy found in Nat one of the kindest and the best of brother's-in-law. But there was one point in his character that made the Christmas and Long Vacation visits of this now leading Counsel at the Chancery Bar less gratifying than they might have been. Nat took all the wind out of her husband's sails. The keen and sharpened intellect of the Barrister—the world-wide expe-

rience that made each new position of affairs familiar as a repetition of something old, as well as Nat's utter impatience of that drowsy existence where one set of common-places stand proxy for the thoughts of all the morning-callers and all the diners-out of "Sleepy Hollow;"—this placed Ned in the unfavourable contrast of the man of lethargy with the man of action.

Ned had naturally been consulted frequently enough about, first, the mysterious letters, and afterwards, the yet more inexplicable visits of Tom Snipe; and now, about this strange lady—a visitor who spoke to the servant in a positive and commanding tone, as one who was not to be denied, and who once had said, "Don't answer me—but fetch your master, sirrah; or both of you, perhaps, will have cause to repent it."

Nat heard all with a feeling shrug of the shoulders—a heavy breath—and that emphatic silence which plainly says, "The case is one quite past my power to remedy."

To Lucy the case seemed all the more alarming, that even Brother Nat, with his deep knowledge of the law, and resources endless, could suggest no kind of relief. Still, Lucy suspected that Nat was not quite ignorant of the nature of his brother's troubles. For, once

old Richard, looking very much concerned, began to venture on the familiarity of the servant long time in the family, and to allude to those “strange doings;” and, from this conversation, Lucy had the pain of gleaning that the common talk of all the tenants, and therefore, probably, of all the country round, was, that Richcourt Manor, by some strange chance or luckless speculation, was “on the point of passing out of Master’s hands.”

This surmise Lucy at once communicated to Brother Nat, who, for the moment, was off his guard, and replied, “No!—no!—very different—that is, utterly without foundation! Contradict it as positively as you please.”

After this assurance, Lucy tried to lead Nat on to something further: but all in vain—Nat soon showed her, by his manner, that it was utterly in vain to look to him for either explanation or assistance—“not, at least,” as he said with a very marked emphasis, “in the present posture of affairs.”

This last observation was carefully treasured in the disconsolate mind of Lucy Walford; though she was utterly at a loss to understand—what Nat’s words plainly implied—the suggestion that further stages might be expected in her husband’s malady, or that his difficulties

yet remained to be developed in a series, perhaps, of yet more alarming consequences.

The doctrine of free will and free agency—that man does what he pleases, and decides for himself—is all very true in quiet times; but, in the more troublous and critical moments of life, something generally occurs to snatch the reins from the trembling hands; and—to cut the knot of inextricable confusion—the bewildered man seems thrust aside, and circumstances act for him.

This is never more true than when the body begins to sympathise with the mind, and when the general health has given way, and the friends perceive that the distracted sufferer is too scared and irresolute to face the ruin or to abide the remedy. We have seen more than one man in such a paralysed and unnerved state. His distraction being greater than he can bear, the sufferer exists no longer. The former man appears to abdicate—the bankrupt is passive while strangers are opening his books, or making free with his estate; for it is a positive relief to him to contend no more. The patient lies writhing with a fractured limb, weighing one suffering against another, and submits to anything like a child.

Such was now the distraction of Edward

Walford, and such the feelings that prompted both submission in himself and energetic interference in Lucy, and in her mother, too ; for, by this time, the surging energies of Lady Harwood had been once more brought to bear upon these desperate proceedings. Edward Walford's state was truly alarming ; an inability to sleep was one of his symptoms, and his physician, powerless "to minister to a mind diseased," expressed himself so strongly, that Lady Harwood was determined to take the conduct of affairs entirely in her own hands, and to bring these mysterious visitors, be the consequences what they might, to an immediate explanation.

The opportunity she sought very soon presented itself. She had given orders that the earliest information should be given her of the appearance of this nameless lady in the neighbourhood.

It was now no longer a secret, either to high or low, that Squire Walford had in some most extraordinary manner placed himself in the power not only of his former tutor, but also of a very remarkable lady, who sometimes took up her abode at the inn, dropped confident expressions as if she were mistress of the whole estate, and need take no denial, however unwelcome, at the Manor-house. Accordingly, all the servants

and dependants were on the alert, and not one of them believed that any lady in the country could be equal to a great emergency like Lady Harwood.

"I wonder," said Richard, now very old, "her Ladyship ha'n't taken this job in hand years back. She can speak her mind sure-ly when she's put up—enough to set a body all in a tremble: many's the time I have heard her."

The whole household, therefore, alarmed at the reports of Master's illness, and being no longer under the necessity of even pretending ignorance of the cause of it, were on the tip-toe of expectation; and soon an arrival at the inn was announced in breathless haste, by a busy looker-on: whereupon Lady Harwood immediately anticipated the visit by a letter, to the effect "that Mr. Walford was too ill to be allowed to enter on any affairs of moment, but that gentleman's wife was most desirous of an interview; and, without allowing herself to judge too precipitately by appearances, however unequivocal those appearances might be, she must plainly say that the woman who could refuse an interview to the wife must be aware she made an admission of dishonour too plain to deceive any one."

"There, Lucy," said Lady Harwood, "if

that letter does not nettle a woman and bring her forward, nothing will. Never mind my making her angry, dear ; you never hear half as much truth as when the enemy's in a passion."

The nameless lady was not very slow in coming forward after this cartel of defiance came to hand. She called—was admitted, and shown into the drawing-room, and there left for a few minutes to "damp her courage, and to show that the wife could take things coolly," as her ladyship artfully arranged it—before Lady Harwood leading the way, followed by her agitated daughter, came, in all her full-blown and expansive dignity, sailing into the room.

Little did she think she encountered one who could play her part as well as Lady Harwood.

On entering the room they heard some one stirring the fire, and were immediately received with much cold and formal courtesy by the lady, who rose from the comfortable corner of the sofa, and pointing to two skeleton-looking chairs—placed as it were at the foot of her throne of dignity, or judgment-seat—implied, with an air of condescension, that her obedient subjects had her sanction to sit down.

Boldness is one thing; presence of mind another. Lady Harwood could extemporise no counter-move; but, quite taken aback, made a

bad opening for the game to follow—allowing the adversary thus to take up a commanding position : for which position, all the expression she could throw into one toss of the head was no countervailing advantage. However, her ladyship's affront made her all the more eager, though not the cooler, or the fitter for the fray. And she began by saying,—

“ I need hardly explain, madam, the cause of my demanding—the cause, I may say, of any mother’s demanding—on the part of a daughter, some explanation ; for, when a female—an utter stranger—who will not even give her name to the servant—pays repeated visits to a married man while his own wife is actually under the same roof—it is high time indeed that some one should interfere.”

“ If this lady is your daughter, and you alluded to her, it was no fault of mine that any mystery hung over my visits. But there is, it seems, the same disposition to make light of female character in the daughter, that I remember in the mother some years since.”

“ Then, to come at once to the point, if your visits admit of any honourable explanation let us have it. What is your business with Mr. Walford ? What is all this anonymous calling and secrecy from one we never heard of in our lives ?”

"Never heard *of* me ! Perhaps you will also affirm, ladies, that you never heard *from* me either ? I must, therefore, refresh your memories a little. Did you not receive a letter some years since, giving you seasonable and timely warning that Edward Walford was in no position to become the husband of your daughter ?"

Here Lucy exclaimed,—

"I never heard of any letter of the kind."

"Stay, dear," said Lady Harwood ; "there was a letter : I did not think fit to sully your mind with the illicit connexion it pretended to expose, but ——"

Here the nameless visitor, whom the reader of course has long since recognised, compressed her lips, ready primed for an outburst of indignant fury—a very blast to shake the house—but, exulting in the triumph that a few moments would afford, yet more sweeping and overwhelming to the foe, for the time she restrained herself.

"—But," continued her Ladyship, "you have, my dear, since heard the name of one Alice Hengen, a barmaid—one of those shameless creatures who are always besetting simple-minded young men ; and this woman, it seems, is the writer who actually confesses to the effrontery of trying to prejudice my mind, and

at such a moment, with a reference to pollution such as that!"

Hannah's hour had come at last; and — even as the thunder-storm, first darkly clouding o'er the brow of heaven, then, with low but distant murmur, at last is concentrated in one fearful crash — so was there a calmness that preceded the final flashes of Hannah's deeply-brooding wrath.

"What! and you dare to speak of my dear sister thus? Well, madam, your daughter shall no longer live in ignorance of truths her mother knows.—It is a light matter, it seems, that a poor girl, as well born and tenderly nurtured as either of you, but thrown by misfortune on the world, has had her whole life blighted by Edward Walford, spoilt and heartless child of luxury and ease! — it is nothing that by lying perfidy, and persuading her dear fond heart he meant to marry her, he took her from her humble servitude, and was only, by the merest accident, prevented from doing all that in him lay to bring her to ruin and to shame! — it is nothing that he threw on the charity of one good, motherly soul, that orphan-girl, broken down in nerve and spirit, and powerless any longer even to do that drudgery which alone is open to woman in her distress! — no, but upon all this injury foul insult

is to be heaped—‘Not sinned against, but sinning,’ is the slanderous cry—and you dare to tell me, heartless creature that you are, to my very face, that the victim of all this life-long misery and wrong—because poor, and having no one to protect her—ranks of course with the most degraded beings of her sex! Shame—shame, upon such soulless conduct! But—but —now I will withhold no longer—you shall hear it all! Say not I did not warn you, madam; I warned you that Edward Walford was married to another —”

“Married! Never: I understood an alliance of another kind.”

“An alliance, doubtless, that was a mere betrothal and a brittle tie—a tie not in law, but honour only: with Lady Harwood a bond of very, very small account. Had you but half as plain a notice that there was a flaw in the title of this estate, you had never rested till you had sifted the rumour to the last; but a flaw in the fair fame of him to whom—keeping her in fatal ignorance, it seems—you linked your daughter—for this flaw, little did your sordid soul take heed, provided—however noble the heart to suffer by this unhallowed union—you could secure his dirty acres for your child; but —”

" Married! Married to whom? Impossible!
I never will believe it! and——"

" Never will believe it! Don't say, 'never';
a simple reference to the register at St. James's
Church will dispel all doubts, and little will your
unbelief avail to sever the legal tie. No, you
are righteously punished for your shameless
deeds. Your base and heartless son-in-law is
justly punished, too; though all too little to
realise that life-long misery his treachery has
brought on one poor girl. Then hear these
words,—

" — YOUR DAUGHTER'S HUSBAND IS ONE
ON SUFFERANCE—my sufferance, too!

" — HIS BABES ARE BASTARDS, and —
his so-called wife—NO WIFE AT ALL, but from this
moment stands before the world as — as cer-
tain to be classed beyond all denial — meeting
a slanderous tongue as yours — with those
wretched creatures you dared to name in the
same breath with my much-injured sister! —"

CHAPTER XXIII.

“ ALL’S WELL THAT ENDS WELL,” THOUGH SOME
THINGS END OTHERWISE.

WITHIN a week from the time of this stormy conference there were sitting in the study of Richcourt Hall two gentlemen. They were carrying on that kind of short-hand conversation of hints, suggestions, and half-sentences, by which two lawyers draw attention to the points of a story, which others would dilute in a sorry waste of words. Their conversation, in point of tone and manner of the speakers, was light, cheerful, and with an air of indifference—lawyers, like doctors, having formed a habit of ignoring, and, as it were, looking right through the tortured subject of their consultations, and confining their attention to as much of the case as lies before them.

The two gentlemen were Nat Walford—

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assisted, at this great family difficulty, by his friend Sir Richard Thompson, knight, then lately promoted, after a rapid rise from the back rows to the front of the courts of Westminster, to the Bench, as Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas—the identical gentleman first known at Mr. Watson's school as “Gritty Thompson;” and last heard of as Fellow of King's College, Oxford.

Sir Richard remarked that the woman Hannah Hengen, or Hannah Walford, whichever she might prove to be, must be a perfect genius in her way: still, without some stronger motive than money usually supplies, long experience had taught him that deeds of real greatness were never carried out.

Nat Walford. “‘Greatness’ you use in the sense of ‘Jonathan Wild the Great?’”

Sir Richard. “Certainly. There is real greatness in this plot. There is a breadth of conception and a *vivida vis animi*—a concentration of energy in the execution, as well as a finish in all the minor details, which, to a lover of crime as one of the fine arts, is invaluable as a study.”

Nat Walford. “The worst of the matter is, I am expected to be hunting down this woman, and to seek every flaw in her case, while my

sympathies are by no means dead against her. Ned's rash and thoughtless conduct throughout life has been such that I am fully prepared to hear anything in the way of recrimination. You remember the Rustication story: the case came before you while resident fellow at King's."

Sir R. Thompson. "Oh! certainly—there was one Alice Hengen, the pretty barmaid; but some said, 'a lady reduced by distress to act in that capacity.'"

Nat Walford. "And what if I tell you the name of this adventuress is Hengen, too?—Hannah Hengen, the sister of that barmaid!"

Sir R. Thompson. "I begin now to see my way—I was looking to some principle more active with woman-kind than the mere greed of money. This adventuress wanted the money she extorted badly enough, on her sister's account; still, that was not the only spring of action. As to the collusion between her and Snipe and that vile solicitor, to make Walford believe the first marriage null and void—the motive for that is plain enough. It gave them the power of a most fearful threat, if once the annuity ceased to be paid."

Nat Walford. "Well done, Thompson! I am glad I sent for you. I have long said, that for making a cast—for a right conjecture in ad-

vance of the bare evidence of the case—I would back you against all the Bar of England. Know, then, that resentment—the acutest sense of wrong done, not to herself but to a favourite sister—furnishes the very motive most violent and virulent in woman."

Sir R. Thompson. "Yes, and perhaps the rule, *Luat in crumená*, to make him pay smart—in purse if not in person—is the lady's policy."

Nat Walford. "Once more you are right. But, in reality, she has punished him in both. If you saw my brother at the present moment, you would say he 'had coined' his 'heart and dropped' his 'blood for drachmas.' He has suffered severely—worn to the very bone."

Sir R. Thompson. "And his poor wife?—Wife did I say!—God grant we may prove her such. That unhappy lady's cruel position thrills through me with the recollection of Miss O'Neil's piercing heart-scream in the *Fatal Marriage*."

Nat Walford (*with some emotion*). "Pray don't speak of it—you un-man me, quite. Lucy is all but frensied. She blames her mother for concealment—weeps bitterly when she sees her children—shrinks from the gaze of every stranger—in a word, unless we can find some deliverance, her case is worse than death. However,

you are now in possession of all the facts—the question is, What's to be done?"

Sir R. Thompson. "One thing we may throw quite aside—or eliminate from the equation to be solved—namely, proving the marriage null and void. As if to make assurance doubly sure, we have 'Hannah Hengen' signed in the register—not only this, but we have also the correct entry of 'Daughter of Robert Hengen'—and 'Station-Master' for his vocation. How could your brother have been blind to this—even for the four-and-twenty hours, the short term of his married life?"

Nat Walford. "Really this oversight is quite unaccountable."

There was nothing to explain to these two gentlemen that, at the time of signing in the vestry, Snipe artfully took off the attention of Ned Walford from the signature of his bride; and as to the other particulars in the register, they are often filled in after the happy couple are gone away.

Sir R. Thompson. "However, even this is superfluous as evidence. That rascal, Snipe, was witness to the marriage. I wish we could catch him tripping—he has drawn 50*l.* a-quarter for years, has he not?"

Nat Walford. "Yes; and much more, too:

100*l.* or 200*l.* extra whenever he got into any scrape.”

Sir Richard bit his lips and shook his head, as if he had some plan in reserve for bringing Snipe within the letter of the law; and then continued,—

“ There was no mistake about the person, only about the name.”

Nat Walford. “ Then, to nullify the marriage is wholly out of the question?”

Sir R. Thompson. “ Walford, in any other man’s case but your own brother’s, I am sure you would hardly dwell upon the question. But, is it impossible—a poor remedy, this may be, yet the best—to make terms with this woman to live out of the country? Can we offer satisfaction for the sister’s wrongs?”

Nat Walford. “ It is now too late—much too late, my dear fellow: a servant listening at the key-hole heard all the disclosure—uttered, you may be sure, in no subdued or quiet tones. The secret’s out—the talk of the village. Village? It is all over England by this time!”

Sir R. Thompson. “ The difficulty seems greater and greater as we look into it. I am really deeply grieved for the poor lady. As to the gentleman in this case, with all due de-

ference, as I am speaking of your brother, Walford, fools try my patience quite as much as knaves."

Nat Walford. "No doubt they do more mischief."

Sir R. Thompson. "Mischief! they do, indeed. Shall any man say there is a swindler in all England who has plunged a family into such a calamity as this?"

Nat Walford. "Then the case seems utterly hopeless?"

Sir R. Thompson. "My sympathies are so strong with the wife and family—I tremble as I use the words—I must hang on to hope a little longer."

Nat Walford. "But you are hoping against hope. We have tried every corner of escape, and none ——"

Sir R. Thompson. "No, not quite all—there is one untried corner yet. Don't ask me to name it just at this moment. Remember, that Hannah Hengen is no common character. Her path through life has, no doubt, been always strange and tortuous—we must carefully trace her antecedents."

Nat Walford. "These may be curious, perhaps; but I do not see how the past can bear upon the present."

Sir R. Thompson. “ You have already paid me the compliment to say that I am good at making a cast, when all trace seems gone. Well, I have made some first-rate hits in cases entrusted to my management. So, say that my intuitions are prophetic, and let me try.

“ I return to town forthwith — you must supply me with answers as to all the points I lay before you. The office I apply to first is that of Grant the Detective. His “ Private-inquiry ” establishment must do its best—a month or two will probably elapse : by the end of which period —such agonising suspense I fear to think of!—I will report, beyond the possibility of a doubt, whether this dear innocent lady shall once more regard her babes as blessings, or whether —whether all the consolations of the next world must alone be sought to alleviate the sorrows of this.”

No sooner had Sir R. Thompson left his friend than the unhappy mother, whose every nerve had been on the quiver till she perceived the consultation over, hastened into the room. The only comfort Nat could offer was to say the case was not quite hopeless. The means of deliverance he could not explain. The ability of Sir Richard, and his success in cutting knots

seemingly inextricable, were very great. Still, for one or two months no definite reply could be expected. Nat could only exhort her to seek for consolation where, in the overwhelming troubles of life, the heart will instinctively take refuge, and to trust implicitly in Him, whose visitations are only for our good, and who, in all His chastenings, remembereth mercy.

It is a strange anomaly, that while man is always complaining of the shortness of life, he would be ever pushing on the hands of the clock of Time if he could ; so frequently does he feel, as a mere tantalising intrusion, those minutes that separate him from objects on which he has set his heart.

“ One or two months ! ” repeated Lucy ; “ one or two years they will seem to me. Let me consider—this is now the middle of August ; then there’s all September ; half October —ah ! and these lawyers are always twice as long as they pretend. Alas ! alas ! how shall I endure ? Poor Edward ! will his reason survive the continual agitation ? But ‘ God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb ’—shorn, indeed ; shorn even to the very quick.”

Never were poor Maria’s words more pitifully in point.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THINGS SHAKE TO RIGHTS WONDERFULLY WELL
CONSIDERING.

SIR R. THOMPSON began to reflect that detectives were anything but conjurers, and that however useful their agents might be to watch a certain person, or perhaps to peep through a certain gimlet-hole, a man of energy and active mind is silly indeed to give up the general conduct of an inquiry to men who have a mere pecuniary interest in the result. "Experience," said he, "is suggestive, no doubt; but hot as I am in the pursuit, with the help of a little common sense, I can do their work in half the time; and this being Long Vacation, I little care which way I travel with an interesting purpose in view."

Accordingly, first he found his way to the abode of good Mrs. Winter, hoping to find her

still alive, and in the enjoyment of all her faculties, at the "Stag Inn," Woodstock.

But the old landlady had been some time dead, and her niece reigned in her stead. "Did this niece remember hearing of Alice Hengen?" "Oh, yes; her name would never be forgotten in Woodstock." "But whence did she come?" The niece could not say. Still, her next reply led Sir Richard to a search of an old trunk full of letters, one of which was from Mrs. Hardaway, recommending Alice Hengen to Mrs. Winter."

By the evening of the next day, Sir Richard was in deep and eager conference with the said Mrs. Hardaway, and was by her referred to the Railway Station, and thus reached the identical little home where we first found the two sisters nursing their dying father. By patient inquiry, Sir Richard at last was in communication with two old friends of the family, both of whom were very curious about Hannah Hengen's doings. Sir Richard, knowing that confidence invites confidence, and one piece of news draws forth another, told the whole story of the rich squire and the wily adventuress; and was about to sift carefully into all that was known of her antecedents, when one of the old dames broke out into a loud "Ha! ha! the biter bit!" "Diamond cut dia-

mond!" and "the like of her to talk about bigamy!" with some allusion to the pot that reflected on the personal appearance of the kettle in the fable.

"Why, what are you thinking of, neighbour?" asked the other dame.

"Where is your memory gone to, Mrs. Simmons? Don't you recollect how her father took on about that wild young fellow she went and married?"

"Married! She never married him; more was the shame."

"I say she did. Robert Hengen told me all about it, in strictest confidence; but the time's gone by now. It was Dr. Barlow's son—the scapegrace!—he was the man; and he deserted her so soon after the secret marriage, that Hannah made believe she never was married at all; for, he had swindled one who trusted him, and fled to foreign parts. Robert Hengen was in a fine way about it, when he related all to me. For if Hannah's starting off with Will Barlow came to be known, then, for the credit of his family, he said he needs must publish the marriage. However, time passed on; other troubles thickened upon Robert; he fell into a decline, and the secret died with him."

Sir R. Thompson. "Is Dr. Barlow living?"

Mrs. Simmons. “No ; but his daughter is living at the top of the Market-place,—married to Tolman the corn-factor.”

Sir R. Thompson. “ You have a wonderfully clear and happy manner of telling a story, Mrs. Simmons—no doubts ; and whatever your neighbour’s memory may be, yours must have been accounted most tenacious—most accurate, throughout life. Indeed, I wonder you should remember names and circumstances so well.”

Mrs. Simmons. “ Well, Sir, though I say it that shouldn’t, my memory is a very good one, and always has been. Why, I could tell you the very church. The banns were put up in the parish church of Hunchester, where twenty pairs of banns are gabbled over every Sunday ; and a pretty gabble it used to be,—a girl’s own father would not recognise her name. In that church they were asked, and in that church they were married.”

Sir R. Thompson. “ In what year did her father die ?”

Mrs. Simmons. “ Die ? Why he died the year that my Susan was born ; twenty years ago, or thereabouts.”

Sir R. Thompson. “ Consequently that will be about the date of this secret marriage.”

Mrs. Simmons. “ What ! Surely you are not

a lawyer gentleman, come to find this out for any purpose?"

Sir R. Thompson (having learnt all he wanted). "I tell you candidly, Mrs. Simmons, that I have an object in this inquiry, though I do not think you need be under much apprehension: the facts are evidently too patent to have long remained unconcealed; so I will ask you to oblige me with one answer more.—Is this Will Barlow now alive?"

Mrs. Simmons. "For all I know he is. He was alive and pretty comfortable, having made some money in foreign parts, no longer ago than three years last fair."

By the evening of the day after this conversation, Sir R. Thompson had obtained a certificate of the marriage of Hannah Hengen to William Barlow, six years before the date of her marriage with Edward Walford.

Three days more had not passed away before he had a personal interview with William Barlow himself, and a very interesting interview this was.

Sir Richard immediately wrote to Nat Walford to meet him in London, saying that a discovery of the highest promise had been made, and his character for intuitive perceptions of things unknown had never been more fully vin-

dicated than on that occasion. At all events, he might proceed to set Mr. and Mrs. Walford's minds at ease ; their marriage being beyond all doubt valid, and their cruel tormentor powerless for the future.

Sir Richard Thompson felt that the case would not be satisfactorily completed till he had put an end to all threats, denials, challenges to proofs, and other causes of protracted doubt to Lucy Walford.

An interview with Hannah Hengen was soon requested and arranged. Hannah was surprised at the deferential language of the letter. Sir Richard, at the same time that he requested a meeting, said that he begged to assure her, that while a satisfactory arrangement respecting Mr. Walford was the purport of their visit, she would receive persons who were by no means prejudiced or prepossessed in favour of one side only.

In this assurance Sir Richard was sincere enough ; of the two, he had more respect for Hannah than for Walford. His clear sagacity already discerned the true state of the case. Indeed, Sir Richard's conversation with Mrs. Hardaway and his recent inquiries into the respectability of the Hengen family, and the touching story he had heard of two tenderly-

nurtured girls thrown penniless upon the world — all this made him justly indignant at the vice or the folly of the man who had so cruelly betrayed a young lady in her distress.

As Nat Walford entered Hannah Hengen's room with Sir Richard, Hannah started with surprise: Nat's likeness to his brother was so striking, she at first thought it was her supposed husband.

Hannah being quite melted at the first onset by the kind and sympathetic manner in which both the gentlemen inquired after Alice: they said how sincerely sorry they were to hear of her confirmed ill health; above all "if caused, however unintentionally," said Sir Richard, "by any friend of ours."

They were soon deep in the conference—Hannah urging that she was the lawful wife, and also morally, if not legally, entitled to the annuity. She said, "You, Sir Richard, must be aware, that but for my forbearance he might long since have been prosecuted for marrying a second time. As long as he paid for my sister's maintenance I never made my appearance at Richcourt; but when once his solicitor (as I now understand) showed an intention of stopping the quarterly payments, I could do nothing less than present myself in person."

Sir Richard. "In what name were you married to Mr. Walford, may I ask?"

Hannah. "In the name of Hannah Hengen."

Sir Richard (most softly and deferentially). "And why not in the name of Hannah—Barlow?"

Here Hannah was taken quite by surprise. However, she soon recovered herself, and said—"I see you have been making inquiries: but no matter; whether I gave my maiden name or my widow's name could make no difference."

Sir Richard. "Then you would say your first husband, William Barlow, was dead?"

Hannah. "It were hard, indeed, to prove him alive. He deserted me the day after the marriage—fled the hands of justice to Australia—and, no doubt, perished in the Bush. He was never heard of more. But such a marriage deserves not the name."

Sir Richard. "And yet I think you will hardly apply the same rule to an equally slight alliance with Edward Walford?"

While Hannah was thinking what reply to make to this argument, Sir Richard remarked, very slowly—dwelling upon every syllable, and acutely marking its effect on the gradual relaxation of every line and feature in Hannah's countenance,—

" Not to protract this interview unnecessarily, allow me to inform you that William Barlow is now alive, and is also most anxious to know how you are, and where you are. Indeed, he inquires most kindly and feelingly about you. He had endeavoured, but in vain, 'to trace his own dear wife'—the very words he used. Nay, more; he laughed exultingly as he heard of a second pretended marriage, and bitterly lamented that you should have been so hardly tried. William Barlow is still unmarried to any other, and has returned as one of the many prosperous colonists."

Hannah uttered at first a faint but audible cry, as from the depths of her inmost soul. But immediately she rigidly compressed her lips in a useless attempt to conceal her emotion; but tears flowed scalding down her cheeks, and her bosom surged with violent emotions.

Sir Richard continued, as if in pity, to obviate the necessity of her making any reply,—

" You are surprised, perhaps, that, severely as the family I represent has suffered through your resentment, I am disposed to speak so calmly on this occasion: but, unhappily, it has come to my knowledge that you—in your family affections—have suffered severely, too."

This was too much for Hannah. Kind words

had been scarce through all her bitter life—the fate of violent natures : but so it was. She rose, and almost staggered in her step as she left the room, and “sought where to weep.”

At length a servant came down to the little parlour and said,—“Sir Richard, alone, was requested to come up-stairs into the drawing-room :” when the first words were,—

“ And does William Barlow live? and did he ask very kindly for me ?”

Sir Richard’s reply satisfied her that he had a little commission, on the present occasion, on behalf of more parties than one. More inquiries—many more followed—and Hannah, led back to the former subject, said it was but too evident that she and her poor sister were quite at their mercy as regarded any provision for the future. “ But,” she said—by this time Nat Walford had been summoned into the room —“ you spoke of my own trials—you seemed to allow for wrongs endured—my poor sister sits moody—taking little interest in anything for days together. There she is,” opening the folding-doors, “ you shall see the wreck—it is all Edward Walford’s doing—with your own eyes.”

As Hannah quietly opened the door to look in first, Alice was heard to say,—

" Is he coming, Hannah?"

" Yes, dear — coming to-morrow."

" Oh, very well! coming to-morrow."

" You heard that, gentlemen? She has a fixed idea. She always asks, 'Is he coming?' and I always give the same answer."

At the same time Hannah opened the folding-doors. Alice turned round — rose suddenly — looked and looked again; and then, mistaking Nat, as Hannah had done, with one spring, crying, — " 'Tis he!" she threw herself, convulsively sobbing, on his neck.

The conclusion of this eventful history is too evident to require many words.

Richcourt Manor from this time forth had its share of calm and happy days. Ned Walford was sufficiently humbled by his own sad reflections, that his "folly" had bred up one human creature for the gallows, and all but given another to the mad-house. In this form had he seen the viperous brood of the *dragons' teeth* sown by his parent's foolish indulgence in his own nature, and also sown broad-cast by himself — all from the self-pleasing habits which that indulgence had tended to form. Ned Walford having thus endured, in divers

forms, the “whips and scorns” of this rude world very late—because spared them at an earlier period—lived far more carefully and wisely for the future. Still, he seemed never happy—he was downcast, and lived in a state of listless apathy.—His good wife did all she could to cheer him; but bitterly complained that he seemed too long used to wearing anxiety to appear ever likely to recover the buoyancy and life that characterised other men.

Tom Snipe was doomed to hear, as pronounced by Sir Richard, a strong legal opinion that placed his evil deeds in a very serious point of view. In Snipe’s case, every penny he had of late years received from Walford was sheer “extortion.” So, Sir Richard asked to be shown all the letters that he had written, and was at no loss to select two, which—added to the evidence Walford could give—brought the writer within the scope of the statute against “threatening letters!”

Walford was very reluctant to prosecute, but Sir Richard and Nat insisted on making an example of him; and Thomas Snipe was sentenced at the next assizes to twelve months’ imprisonment, and has never been heard of since.

Hannah Hengen returned to Will Barlow, her former husband; Ned Walford requiring

little persuasion on the part of Sir Richard and the brother to grant a suitable allowance for the afflicted Alice.

Alice, with change of scene and medical advice, as suggested by Sir Richard, gradually returned to a more satisfactory state of mind ;— but still, we should be teaching a pernicious lesson indeed if we allowed that man, ever too selfish and reckless, should live to see those deep scars which he has left on a poor woman's heart ever completely healed, and such sad traces obliterated, as if they had never been !

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